

punk planet

ISSUE #61

MAY AND JUNE 2004

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notes from underground

IAN MACKAYE | SLEATER-KINNEY | MIKE WATT | JELLO BIAFRA | NEUROSIS | Q & NOT U | THE DESCENDENTS

TEN YEARS OF FIERCE VOICES:

NEW CONVERSATIONS WITH SOME
OF THE LEADING MINDS IN PUNK'S
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.





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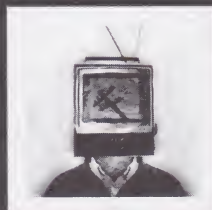
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In 1999; after playing, recording, and touring non-stop for over 5 years, Braid decided to play 5 final shows in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Champaign. These final shows attracted thousands of loyal fans from around the world. Bifocal Media was there to document the band during these last 5 days. This DVD is the result. Includes the original KAC film as well as a new film: KAC 2004 Retrospective, and audio commentary from the band. Over 2 hours of new interviews, and never before seen footage. In stores May 11, 2004.

***BIFOCAL MEDIA**

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Saying goodbye to Sarah Jacobson; getting crazy with Crack: We Are Rock; Anti-War activists get Ashcrofted; Cynthia Plaster Caster's rock documents; GYWO; more!

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the risks

intro61

A few months ago, I was hung up on. I was talking on the phone with an editor at a local alternative weekly. They were doing a cover story on *Punk Planet* and our sibling skate magazine, *Bail*, and the subject of photos came up.

"The problem we're having," she explained, "is that the story is about *you* and we don't have any photos of *just you*."

"I'm sorry," I replied, "but you have no photos with just me because the story *should not* be about me. I am *not* the only person that works on this stuff, and so there's *no* reason why I should be the only person in the photos. If it's a story about these magazines and it's only about me, *then the story is untrue*."

She answered with a dial tone.

There have been literally *hundreds* of people involved in *Punk Planet* since it started 10 years ago. Every single one of them has played an important role (no matter how small) in getting the magazine to where it is at this very moment. They are the people that have written words, stuffed envelopes, drawn pictures, carted boxes,

sent e-mails, answered telephones, clicked mice, listened to records, taken photos, paid bills, and done the many other thankless tasks that add up to form the paper, ink, sweat, and tears that you currently hold in your hands. This issue is for all of them.

Leafing through the early copies of *Punk Planet*, it's unbelievable that we could still be publishing a decade later. Reading some of my own writing makes me cringe—I was *so* young, just 19 years old. We were *all* young. The scene itself was young too, looking back on it now. Sure, we had just weathered the post-Nirvana years, but those days, with their clear black and white lines between what was right and what was wrong, seem like a fairy tale compared to today's grey-smudged delineations.

So much has changed—in the magazine, in the punk scene, in me—that it's hard to see that there was any connection at all. But we are still part of a culture that lives and breathes and changes and grows. And while nothing stays still—nothing vital, at least—you can always count on a

simple truth to never change: that one thing really does lead to another. Even if you don't know where you're going (and at *Punk Planet*, we never have), you at least know where you've been.

To that end, we've assembled 10 people and bands we've previously interviewed in the magazine to have 10 *new* sit-down conversations about where punk has been, where it's at, and where it's going. As is often the case with material in *Punk Planet*, there are contradictions, disagreements, and competing visions. Such is true in life as well. And because of all of the differences—and the underlying similarities as well—I think it paints a compelling portrait of the culture that we all have chosen to be a part of.

Which, ultimately, is all we ever set out to do with *Punk Planet*. As always, I hope you enjoy it.

Thanks to all of you for 10 amazing years,

DAN



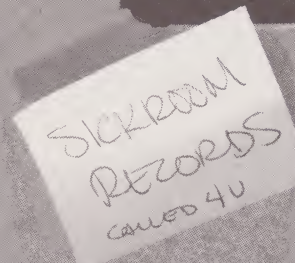
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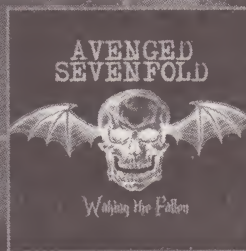
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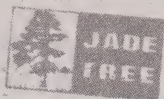
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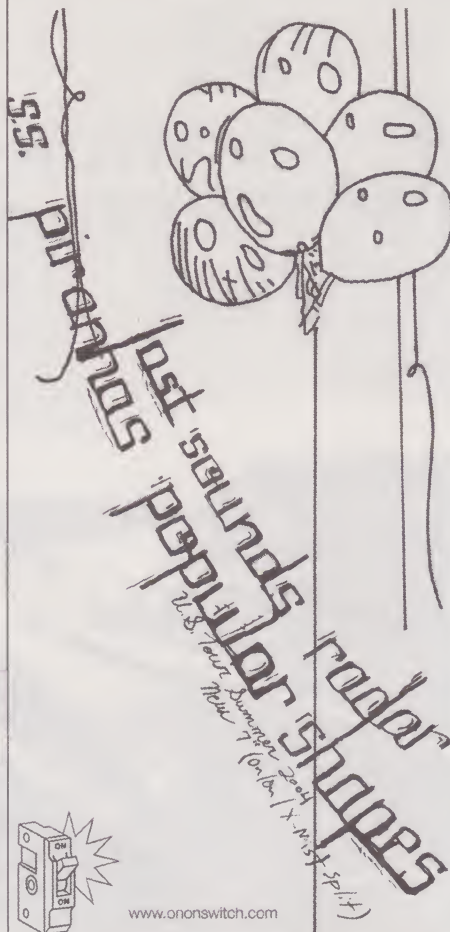
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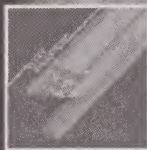
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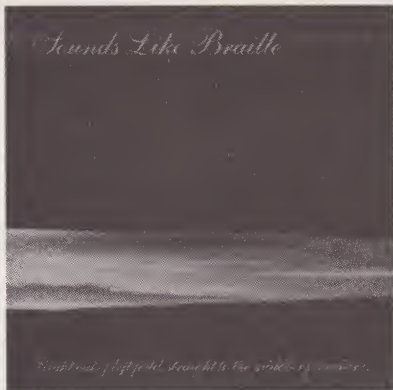
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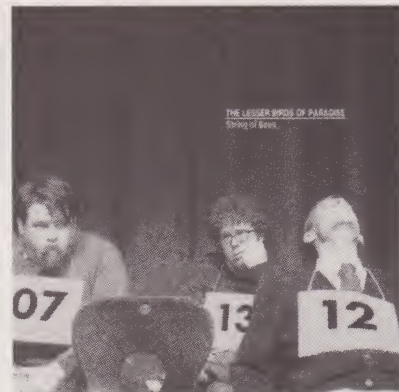
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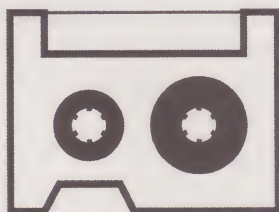
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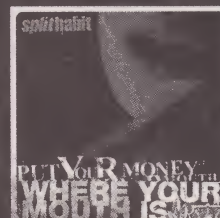
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mail61

You can't please everybody all of the time.

► Punk Planet—

I was quite upset at your cover story last issue ["The Final Countdown" PP60]. I mean, yeah I figured that you all would be liberals, but was it necessary to devote so much space to your political rant? This should be about the MUSIC—that's why we're all here, isn't it? Your magazine has some good bands sometimes, but you crossed a line with me. Please cancel my subscription.

Brian
New York

Punk academics, unite!

► Dear Punk Planet readers,

I am writing as one of three punk/academics who are currently co-editing a collection on the contemporary (post-1980) punk and hardcore scenes. We are writing to invite contributions to the volume by punks, most likely (though this is not a requirement) those who also have one foot in academia. The book will consider issues such as resistance, commodification, social class, geography, identity (gender, race, sexual diversity, etc.), and activism. While we welcome ideas for contributions, we are less interested in those which are simply descriptions of local scenes or aspects of the punk movement. Each contribution should address larger theoretical and political issues in an explicit manner. We

are looking for chapters of about 4,000–6,000 words written for academic readers as well as punks looking for serious discussion of their movement. The deadline is July 1, 2004. For more information, please write to bookof-punks@yahoo.com.

Thanks!

Ben

Is it still DIY?

► Dear Punk Planet—

As a long-time reader of *Punk Planet*, I thought I'd write in to talk about a depressing trend I've witnessed happening to the punk scene. What used to be a beacon of Do-It-Yourselfness has now turned into a lazy example of Let-Someone-Else-Do-It-For-Me. LESED-IFM (not as catchy, huh?) manifests itself in bands that can't book their own tours, labels that can't do their own "publicity," and show-goers that rely on big venues to put on their shows instead of using their basements and other cool spaces. I think it's sad. The other day I watched *Another State of Mind* and was so inspired watching the bands crossing the country, building this whole network that everyone now just totally has forgotten that someone once built. I mean, really, has it become that much harder to put together a tour over two decades after the first punk bands went on the road? There are tons of cool clubs and even more cool kids. Getting

from town to town really shouldn't require a "booking agent" or anything else but a telephone. And seriously, do you really need a publicist to get your records reviewed and bands written about? Has it ever occurred to you that if you have to pay someone to get you into a magazine, maybe you should just go after a different magazine? Second of all, why does it seem like these people—the publicists and the tour bookers—get paid even when the band doesn't? It seems like this whole damn scene's priorities have gotten smacked on the head somewhere along the way. It's called DO IT YOURSELF people. We need to start doing more of that.

Sorry to go off like that, but it needed to be said.

Erin Cunningham
San Francisco

You're welcome.

► Punks—

I'd like to take a moment and thank you for so much hard work. It occurred to me today when I was reading issue 60 that I've been reading *Punk Planet* for a long time and I've never thanked you. So thanks!

Paul Franklin
London

You write us letters, we print them (or at least as many as we can fit). Send to either:

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- Joann, So Amboy, NJ

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- Chad, Fresno, CA

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- Phil, Merseyside, England

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- Dixie, New Orleans, LA

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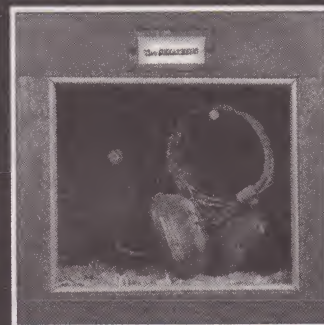
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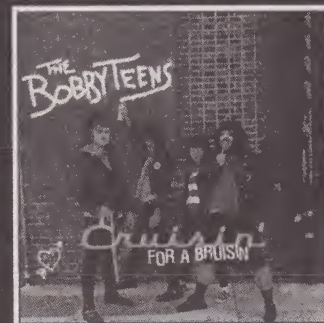
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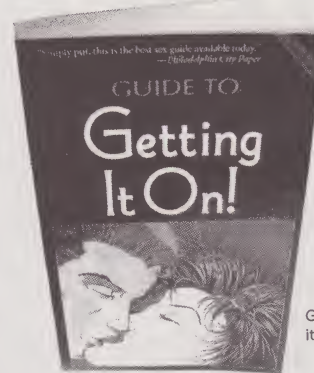


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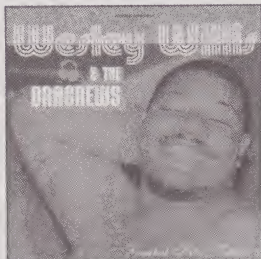
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...shall be visited upon the son.

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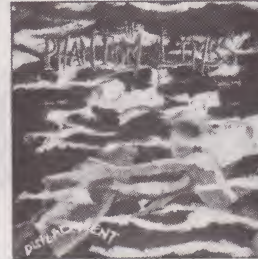
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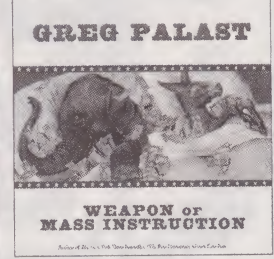
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TV On The Radio

desperate youth, blood thirsty babes



This new offering picks up where their EP *Young Liars* left off; which is to say, in complete silence. Seconds later, a broken saxophone sparks a rusty flame over superhero psycho bop and we're in it to win it.

Nine songs about (in no particular order) – discordant living, misrepresentation, how nothing nothing can be, life, afterlife, love and love "after hours". Scandalous.

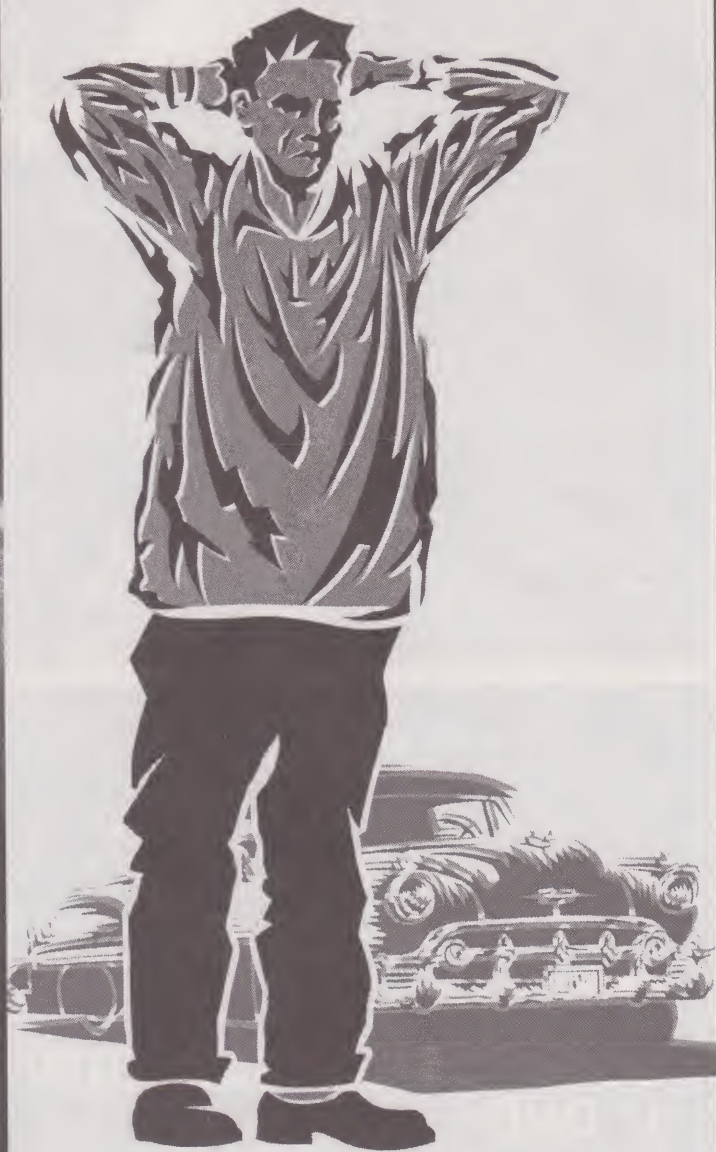
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CALEXICO CONVICT POOL



Convict Pool is a collection of originals and covers that span the wide range of **Calexico's** abilities and influences. Covers include Love's "Alone Again Or", François Breut's "Si Tu Disais", and the Minutemen classic "Corona". In total, six songs; three originals, three covers, all **Calexico**.

"Burns and Convertino have an inspired, cinematic vision, and the only mystery here is why they aren't better known. At this point, **Calexico's** probably the best band you've never heard." – Paper 1/03

qs90 cdep \$9





static

SCANNING THE DIAL FOR LIFE ON THE MARGINS

Fade to Black

REMEMBERING FILMMAKER (AND *PUNK PLANET* CONTRIBUTOR) SARAH JACOBSON.

"Everybody thinks that some fairy godmother is going to come along and bop them on the head and say, 'Look, you're cool,'" filmmaker Sarah Jacobson told *Punk Planet* in 1997 (she would start writing film reviews for the magazine a few months later), "and it's so not true. Everyone I know that is successful works so hard. People don't realize that. They just think it happens. Even if you get really successful, even if you get this huge company behind you . . . no matter what you do, it's work."

Sarah Jacobson understood work. She was unrelenting in her passion to get her DIY films seen—tossing them into the back of a station wagon and taking them on tour, selling tapes out of her bedroom, begging reporters for a few more column inches.

Jacobson had "a lot of persistence, nerve, and stamina," remembers fellow film-

maker Helen Stickler. "She was always working."

That image—of a relentless DIY promoter, of a filmmaker fighting to keep her vision clear, of a woman unwilling to bend in a man's world—stuck with her until the end.

Sarah Jacobson died in February of uterine cancer that had been discovered too late. She was only 32 years old. Working until the very end, Jacobson helped to compile a retrospective of her films that was screened posthumously.

"As a woman filmmaker, she represented a voice that is very rarely heard in cinema: an assertive voice that questions the way things are and tries to offer an alternative, no matter how radical," says Stickler.

That voice first became a part of the tight-knit independent film community in 1993, with Jacobson's take-no-prisoners short *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*. The 27-minute film

packed as many bloody kills into its grainy, black and white frame as more traditional slasher fare fit into a full 90 minutes. And although the violence was gratuitous and undeniably twisted, it wasn't senseless. In fact, in the end, Jacobson's serial killer begins to actually understand what it was that drove her to kill. Unlike any other slasher flick, Jacobson's killer sees she's not getting anywhere and begins to look for peace within herself.

Jacobson made *Serial Killer* while studying under trash cinema "king" George Kuchar at the San Francisco Art Institute. Never one to shy away from a fight, Jacobson found her first when the film department wouldn't screen *Serial Killer* at a year-end student film show.

"I think that her willingness to 'fuck shit up' shows that she was a person unafraid of conflict," says Stickler. "That comes through in her films. Nearly all of her films dealt with conflict, usually within relationships of some kind."

Jacobson upped the ante in every possible way with her follow-up to *Serial Killer*, the feature-length 1996 film *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*. She started making the film when she was just 22 years old. An ambitious project for someone seemingly impossibly young, it took her three years to complete. "Thank god I actually finished the movie before I turned 25!" she told *Punk Planet* at the time.

With its well-rounded characters, linear plotline, and color stock, the film broke from the grainy B-movie aesthetic Jacobson had become associated with. But with a budget of only \$50,000 (raised almost entirely from friends and supporters), the DIY filmmaking chops she had previously honed were put to the test at every turn.

"There were so many times working on *Mary Jane* that I fell flat on my face," Jacobson said laughingly in '97. "You have to let yourself look like a total idiot and be completely miserable, as long



"We've moved away from chaos to topics that are more ethereal."

SAN FRANCISCO'S CRACK: WE ARE ROCK TURN DANCE MUSIC ON ITS END.

Crack: We Are Rock is a band from San Francisco who can only be described as the musical equivalent to early 20th century traveling sideshows. Their first release, *Silent Fantasy*, was an urgent statement of distorted beats, distorted keyboards and distorted subject matter. It was really good dance music for really bad dance parties.

On their second release for Oakland's Tigerbeat6 label, *Cosmic Mind Flight*, the distortion is still there but the songs are more anthem-like. At times they almost sound hopeful. It's what World War I hurdy-gurdy music would sound like if it were performed by a group of World War III survivors. Crack: We Are Rock are King Riff (keyboards) L'Erin (vocals and keyboards), Le Kim (drum machine/ sampler) and Obscuratron (keyboards and drum machine).

I met Crack: We Are Rock at King Riff's warehouse in the Mission district, where I couldn't help but wonder: did they play the soundtrack to "Forbidden Planet" on the hi-fi intentionally for this interview, or do they listen to it a lot?

as you're able to pick yourself up and have back at it."

Jacobson did pick herself up and her film opened the 1996 Chicago Underground Film Festival. At a late night impromptu bowling tourney during the festival, drunk on cheap beer and the excitement of being young and successful, Jacobson was a whirling vision—laughing and smiling and cracking wise.

That she is dead now is still hard to accept for many.

"When I heard Sarah was sick some months back," says Stickler, "I thought and hoped—as many of us did—that if anyone could beat out cancer, it would be Sarah. She was a fighter."

Jacobson was a fighter. She fought to make her films and fought to have them seen.

When traditional art house distributors were cool to *Mary Jane*, she and her mother Ruth helped book the film in cinemas, clubs, and festivals the world over. In the process, she helped pioneer the concept of the "punk rock film tour."

Sarah lead the charge of a growing pack of filmmakers who "were as influenced by underground music culture as film culture," fellow filmmakers Michael Galinsky and Suki Hawley wrote in an e-mail. "Since the audience for these films was in the clubs, filmmakers like Sarah and ourselves brought our films there."

It was a unique concept at the time, just as groundbreaking and foundation-building as when Rollins and company got "in the van" a decade ear-

lier. The film screenings that have cropped up in punk clubs, bookstores, and basements since ultimately have Jacobson to thank.

Jacobson spent the last few years doing more commercial work for cable outlets like Oxygen, but had already completed a screenplay for her next no-budget film, *Sleaze*, about an all-girl punk band struggling for inclusion in the underground.

It would have been great.

"It's too cruel her potential has been cut short," says Stickler. "We can all picture the incredible, cool, ass-kicking, female-empowering, fun, confrontational, pop-loving epics Sarah has already imagined and was capable of pulling off."

—Daniel Sinker with Cate Levinson.

Remember Sarah at:
www.indiewire.com/remembersarah

Big brother eyes the heartland.

WERE ARRESTS AND FEDERAL SUBPOENAS AFTER AN IOWA ANTI-WAR PROTEST THE HARBINGER OF NEW GOVERNMENT SNOOPING?

Antiwar activists in Des Moines don't usually make national headlines—they

barely even make Iowa's headlines. But we are living in interesting times.

Are you true metal or false metal? And, if you are in fact false metal, shouldn't you be put to death?

Obscuratron: Uh, What are you talking about . . . we're not metal.

Hasn't Judas Priest called you out for ripping them off yet?

Le Kim: Who?

Judas . . . Priest. I heard that you guys have been running around telling people that you're metal.

King Riff: We're rock.

Le Kim: Phew... that was close.

Your older songs dealt with hookers, sex in caves, and transsexuals, while your newer material centers on gnomes, cats, and flying horses. Do you think that, lyrically, you're regressing?

L'Erin: We've moved away from chaos to topics that are more ethereal.

Le Kim: We were paleolithic.

Obscuratron : Technolithic.

L'Erin: You're both wrong. We're monolithic.

Obscuratron : A huge object—this is true metal at its best.

Your first out-of-town show was in Japan—how did that happen?

Obscuratron: Yeah, we skipped that whole Santa Rosa gig at the Holiday Inn. We spent 12 days in Japan and only played two shows. And they were both on the same day. The rest of the time was spent going to record stores and very timidly trying to pedal our wares.

There are rumors that in *Crack: We Are Rock*, the men make the music and the women just sing. Is that true?

Obscuratron: That idea has been thrown around a lot. Even a friend of ours in LA gave a critique of us based on the false impression that King Riff and I were puppet masters. That's not the case: Everyone contributes 100 percent.

Le Kim: We've always done it that way.

Obscuratron: More than 50 percent of the songs are based on what Kim does with the drumbeats.

Le Kim: No one brings a finished song to the table; we always build on material during practice.

Obscuratron: I try to bring notated music for King Riff, but he never sticks to the script.

L'Erin: He plays everything backwards. —Phengren Oswald

For more information on *Crack: We Are Rock*, stop by www.tigerbeat6.com

A federal grand jury subpoenaed Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, in early February, ordering it to turn over all documents related to an anti-war conference held on its campus in November. Four additional subpoenas were issued to Des Moines peace activists Brian Terrell, Elton Davis, Patti McKee and Wendy Vasquez, who participated in the daylong conference and a demonstration the following day.

A Polk County Sheriff's deputy attached to the local FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force served the subpoenas, fueling ongoing speculation on the nature and purpose of the investigation. The mystery deepened when the US attorney withdrew the subpoenas

February 10, just one week after they had been issued, and offered no explanation. The same day, a federal judge lifted a gag order that had been imposed on the university, ordering officials not to discuss the inquiry into the anti-war conference.

Despite the reprieve, many activists continue to ask questions and demand answers. "There needs to be an explanation of what started this investigation and assurances that it is over," says National Lawyers Guild attorney Bruce Nestor.

Peace activists say there was nothing unusual about the activities that occurred on the Drake campus the weekend of November 15 and 16.

The conference—called

"Stop the Occupation! Bring the Iowa Guard Home"—was on a Saturday. People attended workshops on Iraq, the roots of terrorism, and how to talk about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. After lunch, about two dozen attended a nonviolence training and direct-action planning for those interested in committing civil disobedience at the Iowa National Guard Armory on Sunday. There was a legal demonstration as well.

"We did the typical stuff," says Terrell, who helped oversee the nonviolence training with Iowa Peace Network director Patti McKee.

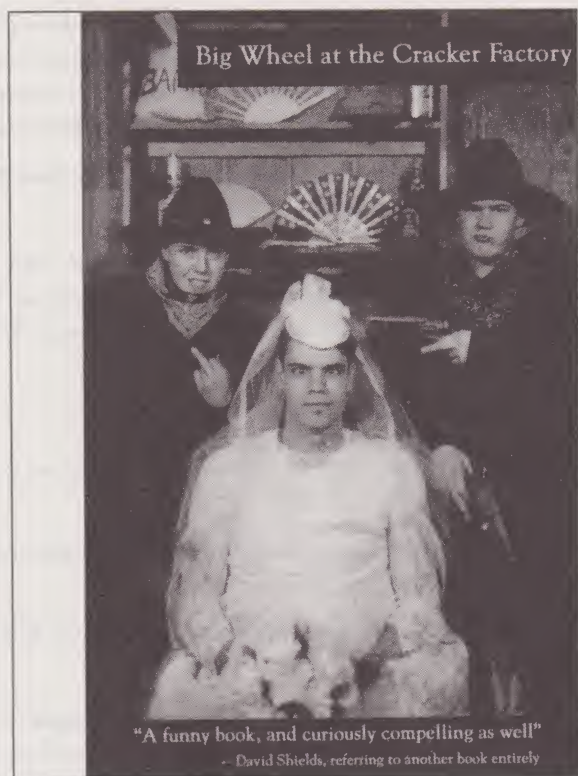
The next day around 70 peace activists showed up at the Iowa National Guard

headquarters in nearby Johnston.

"We've been there before," Terrell said. "Usually it's been very friendly with a low-key and low-risk civil disobedience kind of thing." But this time a small army was waiting for the protesters. "They had full riot gear, Kevlar vests, four foot batons and face shields," he says.

A road separated the demonstration from the armory. And when the group planning civil disobedience prepared to cross the road, they were arrested immediately. They were taken to jail, court dates were set, and then everybody went home.

On February 3, Terrell was served a subpoena



Bad Day at Work

DIY AUTHOR MICKEY HESS DOCUMENTS THE DRUDGERY OF WORKING FOR A LIVING.

Mickey Hess isn't sitting on his laurels. He's a hip-hop aficionado, a college lecturer teaching in Louisville, a grad student writing his dissertation and a self-published author of *Big Wheel at the Cracker Factory*. It is a bristling, non-fiction account about the struggle to get paid. More than just a simple story about making money, it's about the challenge of finding a job that will allow you pay the rent while maintaining some sense of personal dignity.

What are some of the strange and terrible jobs you've had that are recounted in the book?

Ice cream truck driver, ball-pit monitor at an arcade, a torturer at a haunted house, and an incompetent house-sitter—my friend broke their toilet tank masturbating. Most of them lasted a day or two, a week at the most. I just wanted to walk in there with "college instructor" on my resume but then prove myself the biggest fuck-up imaginable, which wasn't hard. It usually wasn't even intentional, because I'm naturally kind of a fuck-up. The house-sitting job kept calling me back though, even after we destroyed the toilet and the computer and killed a parakeet.

ordering him to appear before a federal grand jury in exactly one week. The detective serving the subpoena handed Terrell a business card: Detective Jeff Warford, FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force. Some questioned why a sheriff's deputy would be delivering federal subpoenas.

The subpoena was vague, revealing little more than the fact that there was an investigation into a possible violation of federal law and he was wanted on the witness stand. "It could have been anything," Terrell says. "We're pretty busy. There are a lot of things they might have wanted to know about."

By the end of the day Davis and McKee had each

received subpoenas that were equally vague.

Then news of another subpoena came—targeting Drake University. The Drake subpoena demanded all documents related to the student chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, the official host of the conference.

Randall Wilson, representing Vasquez, says he was alarmed by grand jury involvement in the investigation. "There are almost no restrictions as to what a grand jury can look into or how long or how hard. It can be used repressively. We would hope that's not happening here."

Michael Avery, president of the National Lawyers Guild, says such a move has troubling roots. "In southern

states during the '60s, officials tried to get membership lists from the NAACP and other civil rights organizations," he says.

Nestor describes the Drake subpoena as "a broad request for any records that the university has regarding the anti-war conference," including "the name of the individual who reserved the room, the names of all people who attended the conference, any meeting agendas or reports filed by the National Lawyers Guild student chapter and other documents that the university has pertaining to the National Lawyers Guild."

"What we see so far causes us great concern that this is designed to harass and intim-

idate the anti-war movement," Nestor says.

The US Attorney's Office refused to comment on the investigation until February 9, when the US attorney in Des Moines, Stephen O'Meara, issued a statement saying the investigation did not involve terrorism, but trespassing at the Iowa National Guard headquarters. According to the statement, "The United States Attorney's Office does not prosecute persons peacefully and lawfully engaged in assemblies, which are conducted under the protection of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States."

The investigation, it said, had "narrowed to determine whether there were any viola-

What prompted you to write this all down?

When I started working on the book, I was teaching classes at four different colleges. During the summers, I was working as a waiter or whatever I could find. I didn't have any benefits or insurance, not even a teaching contract. All of the adjunct faculty or part-time lecturers I knew—people who *teach college classes*—have to take on other jobs just to survive. Chances are, if you've gone to college, you've taken classes from some of them. I knew a guy who managed Subway all summer when his university didn't offer him any classes to teach. There's someone I put in the book who actually runs a side business selling curtains over the phone—during his office hours, he actually sits on the phone and he calls customers to talk about their window treatments. ¶ The idea to document all of this just jumped out at me. I knew I could walk right into the arcade and write "college instructor" under previous employment and have *no problem* whatsoever getting the job. Or the ice cream truck company, the boss just said "college teacher, huh? All right. Can you drive a stick?" My favorite part of writing the book was the interviews I did with my wife and my friends, who became characters in the book. They really admitted some things on tape that I don't think we would ever have said out loud each other; about how trapped and scared they feel by the prospect of starting a job they might have for the rest of their lives. About how "library assistant" or "resource coordinator" isn't exactly the self-image they hold. It was really illuminating.

tions of federal law" at the Iowa National Guard headquarters or if there were "prior agreements to violate federal law."

The statement did little to assuage those most disturbed by the nature of the investigation.

"I think the current administration in Washington has made clear in a variety of ways that it's trying to criminalize and demonize people who dissent from their policies," Avery says.

"If their claim is this was a narrow investigation of criminal trespass," Nestor asked, "why were they seeking records of the state chapter of National Lawyers Guild dating back to January 2002? If that is the under-

standing of the US attorney about a proper use of the grand jury, that's extraordinarily frightening.

"Absent was strong showing that there really was some relation there," he continues, "That's using the government and law enforcement to investigate protected political activity."

After the gag order was lifted, Drake University president David Maxwell said he was troubled by the investigation into the November conference. "Of all places, we are a safe haven for ideas, and particularly for unpopular ideas," he said.

Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin offered his support to the activists, when he sent off a letter to Attorney General John

Big Wheel is full of humor, yet still seems to belong to a world of writing presented in books like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Jungle*, which explore the working conditions of everyday Americans. Do you see a change in the future of the working class as it now stands?

What I wanted to say with the book is that we're all fucked over by the system of work. I think of where I am since I wrote the book and, although I got a better job, it hasn't changed. The change I see in the future of the working class is that it's going to expand to include almost all of us. At each end will be extreme wealth or extreme poverty, but the distance between upper-middle class and lower-middle class will collapse.

What I find most inspiring is the fact that you often give your books away for free, leaving them in bookstores, cafes, and with strangers. What's the motivation behind this?

Well, I gave 1,000 copies of my last book, *El Cumpleaños de Paco*, away for free. I believed I was fighting the evil publishing industry. But honestly, it confused people. People are suspicious of *anything* free. I was at a bar one night and saw one of my books get kicked around the floor until it was finally swept up and thrown away. That was when I decided to charge for the next one. I've still given away quite a few copies of *Big Wheel*, but I've sold enough to break even on the money I put into it. Who needs more than that? —Joe Meno

Pick up *Big Wheel* at the Cracker Factory at www.mickeyhess.net

Ashcroft the day they were scheduled to appear in court.

"I hope the steps taken in this case are an effort to protect citizens and security, not to silence legitimate voices calling for peace," Harkin wrote. "When law-enforcement measures are

disproportionate to the activities they target, or when they appear to target activities that are legitimate expressions of dissent, then those law-enforcement measures have a chilling effect. They stifle liberty instead of protecting it." —Jeff Guntzel

"It seems like now they do it so they can be on the same mantel as Jimi Hendrix."

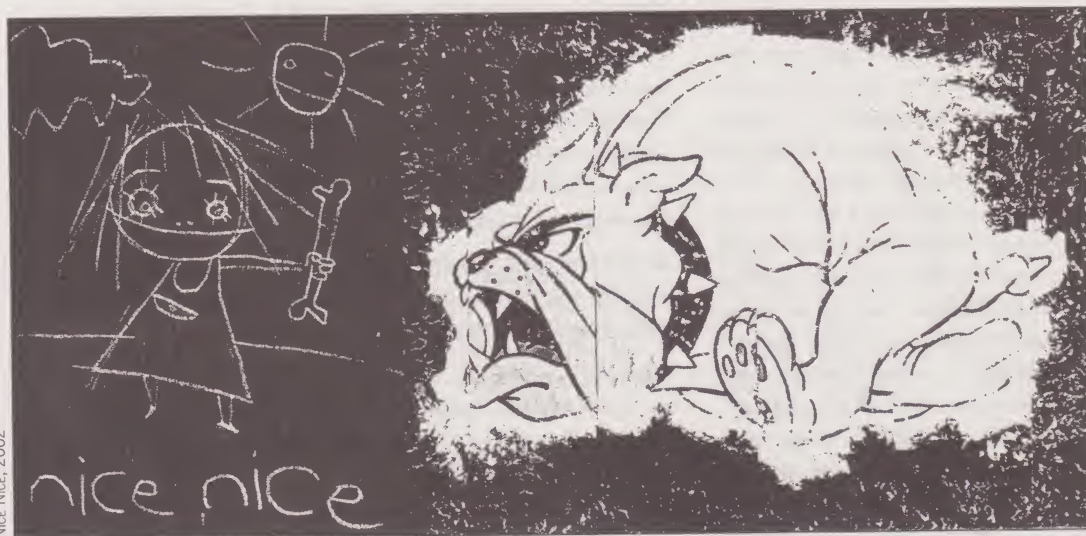
FOR OVER 35 YEARS, ARTIST CYNTHIA PLASTER CASTER HAS DOCUMENTED THE MOST INTIMATE PARTS OF THE ROCK'N'ROLL UNDERGROUND.

In 1968, Cynthia Albritton, a 19-year-old art student, snuck into the Chicago Hotel to complete an assignment for a class that required her to plaster-cast some-

thing hard. A devout groupie, the words "something hard" painted only one picture in her mind: plaster replicas of some of the most famous dicks in rock'n'roll

GALLERY: Thought Crimes

ARTWORK BY BASK



NICE NICE, 2002



ALL BETTER NOW, 2003

RISE & SHINE, 2002

history. So when she and her friend found Paul Revere and the Raiders frontman Mark Lindsay's room, she simply had to ask him for help with her homework.

Lindsay wasn't too keen on her art idea, but he didn't turn Cynthia away altogether. Now 56 and known simply as Cynthia Plaster Caster, she says that although she didn't get her project done that night, Lindsay did help her overcome an important milestone: she lost her virginity.

Cynthia didn't let Lindsay's denial discourage her. Eventually, she found a whole slew of rock stars—from Jimi Hendrix to Jello Biafra—who jumped at the chance to dip their dick in Cynthia's legendary dental mold that she says is "not super uncomfortable, it's just kind of chilly."

Decades later, Cynthia is still casting. What began as a

creative way to meet men, became her contribution to rock-'n'-roll history. In 2000 she began casting the breasts of women artists such as Peaches, Suzi Gardner, and Sally Timms.

Cynthia's life and work is chronicled in *Plaster Caster*, a documentary that was released on DVD this winter. And while the film has prompted more strangers to recognize the artist in her native Chicago, there's at least one person in the city who has no clue what Cynthia does: her 88-year-old mother.

You've always said that you don't consider the term "groupie" derogatory—do you still consider yourself a groupie?

Yeah, it's like alcoholism. It's always in your blood; especially when you've taken it to a certain point. You'll never look at bands the same way. I

always check them out, and think, "Who's the most shagable?" I play little guessing-games with myself, I try to figure out who's married without looking down at their hands for wedding bands.

How did men originally respond to the plaster-casting process?

Back then [in the 1960s], you just kind of had this social obligation to dip your dick into something new and different. And if you didn't then you weren't, you know, very experimental and you were not very groovy. That was one of the reasons why it was easy to find people to do it.

Is it more difficult to convince people now?

I don't find that they do it for the same reason as back then. It's not part of the sexual revolution anymore. It seems like

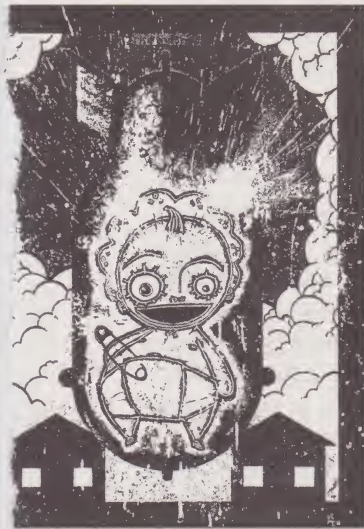
now they do it so that they can be on the same mantel as Jimi Hendrix.

Have you been criticized for what you do?

I've been called "freak" mainly and probably "loser" behind my back. I can tell that a lot of people don't get it. A lot of the media have accused me of spreading AIDS through dental molds. The European press generally gets it, but some Americans get all freaked out.

You met David Bowie but didn't get to cast him, right?

No—oh god, I *wanted* to. I was so much in awe of him I couldn't talk to him. I would get that way a lot with rock stars that I really adored. When I was out in Hollywood to see a show, I got introduced to him by Rodney Bingenheimer. Rodney is known as the



BAD NEWS, 2003



MORE PROTEIN, 2002



WILL WORK FOR FOOD, 2003



The 26-year-old self-taught Bask combines pop-culture cues with found items to "symbolize the consumed and discarded flotsam of commerce." Bask's work is online at: www.baskinyourthoughtcrimes.com

"Mayor of Sunset Strip." He knew *everybody*. He introduced me to Bowie and I couldn't talk to him. I just stood there with my hand out to him, melting in the ground. I had come all the way from Chicago for this moment and I couldn't talk to him. He was so nice, he was just looking really patient, and then I think he got embarrassed or felt sorry for me and just gently pulled his hand out of my hand. Oh god, it's still hard to think about it without getting a little woozy.

Does your family know about your plaster castings?

Well, my father passed away, but he was this dirty-joke-cracking, wild party boy, and even though I never told him about it, I have a feeling that if I had, he would have thought it was hilarious. My

mom, on the other hand, will *never* know about it. I have to make sure of that—she's always been super conservative.

Did your mom ever talk to you about sex when you were young?

Oh, she tried. Well actually she didn't try to talk—she just wasn't very good at verbalizing anything. The way she did it was, I came home from school and she was sitting in a swivel chair facing the window and she swiveled around in one of those, you know, old-fashioned, those '60s swivel chairs, flung this pamphlet at me about the facts of life, and swiveled back to looking at the window. That was one of a few weak attempts at "the talk."

—Marti Trgovich

Cynthia is online at:
www.cynthiaplastercaster.com

Kill the Indian and spare the child

A TRAGIC DEATH AT AN INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT THE CONTINUED MISTREATMENT OF NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH.

"Kill the Indian and save the man," was the motto of General Richard Pratt, who in 1879 founded the first off-reservation Indian boarding school after a stint commanding an Indian Prisoner Of War camp. It is possible that administrators and staff at Salem, Oregon's Chemawa Indian School, one of only a handful of Indian boarding schools still in existence, still hold Pratt's motto true.

On Saturday, December 6, 2003, 16-year old Cindy Gilbert Sohapp, a student at the school, died in a detention cell on the boarding school's

campus. She is believed to have been placed there after drinking with friends during the weekend and was found dead by emergency medical personnel at 11:22 p.m.

Two school administrators and two security officers were immediately placed on paid administrative leave while the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the FBI initiated full-blown investigations into her death. Staff and students — many unable to express their grief, rage, and sorrow — were instructed not to discuss the Sohapp case until investigations were completed. After a



"I'll always love him with all my heart."

CUT DOWN BY A HIT-AND-RUN DRIVER, CHIN UP CHIN UP BASSIST CHRIS SAATHOFF'S FRIENDS AND FAMILY HELP MAKE SOME GOOD COME OUT OF SO MUCH HURT.

The auto pound was quiet and still the night Chris and Jared Saathoff sat together under the star-flecked sky. Chris told his younger brother that he was happier than he had ever been in his life: he had good friends, a good job, two bands, and on top of that he was falling in love. The following night, as he and his girlfriend, Tiffany Weeder were walking home from the Empty Bottle, the couple was struck by a SUV as it ran a red light, and fled the scene. Weeder was rushed to a nearby hospital and was treated for her injuries, but Saathoff was pronounced dead at the scene.

In the wake of the tragedy, Chris' family and friends came together to support one another in dealing with their grief. "His parents came over to his house and there were about 25 of us there," recalls Jeremy Bolen, the guitarist for the band Chris was in, Chin Up Chin Up. "Chris' father had the idea for the Foundation before he got to the apartment, it was one of the first things he mentioned when he arrived."

month of investigating, the FBI released their unsurprising findings: Cindy Gilbert Sohapp, they disclosed, died of alcohol poisoning.

Cindy Gilbert Sohapp died in one of the Chemawa Indian School's unique substance abuse treatment centers: eight-by-nine foot, white-washed, concrete detention cells, in which students who are found to be under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or anger are placed for days at a time, monitored constantly by video and occasionally by guards. There are four of these cells in the maintenance building on campus, and although they are not mentioned in the parent/student handbook or the online brochure, they are rumored to be filled most weekends.

The Chemawa Indian School is the oldest continuously operating Indian boarding school in the country. The holding cells, however, were added in 1989. Indian Health Services balked immediately at their construction. More than one school psychologist has vociferously complained of their existence. Experts in alcohol abuse and administrators of other schools—even those that serve populations as notoriously "troubled" as Chemawa's—far prefer to bring intoxicated youth to local emergency rooms or call 911 than to place them in video-monitored isolation.

The boarding school system, in place since the late 19th century, began to fall out of favor with the Bureau of

Indian Affairs in the 1920s when reports came to light of rampant substandard educational practices, poor nutrition, a lack of medical services, and a heavy reliance on student labor. The boarding schools are considered by many historians, activists, and tribal officials, to be one of the most effective strategies used to decimate Native American culture. Students were punished for speaking native languages, given new "Christian" names and wardrobes, and were unable to visit home or family. By tearing families apart, isolating children from their cultural heritage at a crucial time in their development, the boarding schools left many young Indians no choice but to assimilate, and a

cultural extinction of astounding proportions occurred in a very short period of time.

Chemawa remains one of the last of such schools. It is largely seen today as a specialized treatment center for troubled Indian youth. "When I see kids from Chemawa," Officer Bob Owings of the Salem Police Department told an AP reporter, "I anticipate them drinking, drunk, or sick."

Administrators at Chemawa — as well as other Indian schools — remain tight-lipped about the incident, particularly to non-Indian press. One tribal official would only go on record agreeing that "you would hope [youth] would be safe in a boarding school." Her unex-

Brad Saathoff explained his idea for the Chris Saathoff Foundation to the group of friends. Bolen says that he proposed they build a non-profit center in Chicago that will offer independent "musicians a space to practice and record for next to nothing."

Chris' friends jumped at the chance to help "It makes plenty of sense," says Bolen. "It was his parent's idea, and I can't think of anything better that would both remember Chris and help a lot of people he loved out."

"The outpouring of support after Chris was killed was almost overwhelming," says Quinn Goodwillie, Chris' roommate. "People from many different organizations came forward immediately to offer their support," says Goodwillie. "Busy Beaver donated the buttons we handed out at Chris' memorial service; a local lawyer came forward to lend his services in establishing the foundation pro bono; Michael Burton, a founding member of the Chicago chapter of Critical Mass and Logan Square Walks, wanted to organize a memorial walk in Chris' honor; The Empty Bottle, Fireside Bowl, and Schuba's have all come forward with offers to host benefit shows . . . the list goes on and on."

Bolen has already booked two benefit shows for the new foundation. The first was March 19th at the Empty Bottle, the same club where Saathoff attended a show the night he died. The second will be at the Fireside Bowl, where Chin Up Chin Up will headline with Goodwillie filling in for Chris on bass. All proceeds will go to the

Foundation.

"Chris put a lot of love into the world and when this tragedy occurred I think it came back to him ten fold because people adored him," says Goodwillie. "He was kind, funny, quirky, intelligent, compassionate, generous and always up for anything. I have never met somebody as special as Chris Saathoff in my life and I'll always love him with all my heart."

"It was truly amazing how his friends, family, and band mates instantly bound together to try to create something positive from this devastating tragedy," says guitarist Jeremy Bolen. —Cate Levinson

Learn more about Chris at his band's website: www.chinupchinup.com

pressed concern—and the unfortunate reality of the situation—is that they are not.

Although mentioned in the parent/student handbook, proper substance abuse treatment centers (counselors instead of video cameras and treatment instead of holding cells) were defunded some years ago. If any real opportunities exist for these youth to avoid the rampant drug and alcohol addiction, cope with

abusive family members, and get over the self-destructive tendencies instilled in them through perpetual poverty, racism, and disease, they are not apparent. Monitoring of students placed in the holding cells, policies and procedures regulating the treatment of intoxicated youth, and the presence of any other substance abuse treatment facilities are, at present, unclear.

—Anne Elizabeth Moore

Bird's Eye View

INSIDE THE PRIVATE WORLD AND CURIOUS SONGS OF ANDREW BIRD.

On and off over the last three years, Andrew Bird voluntarily coops himself up

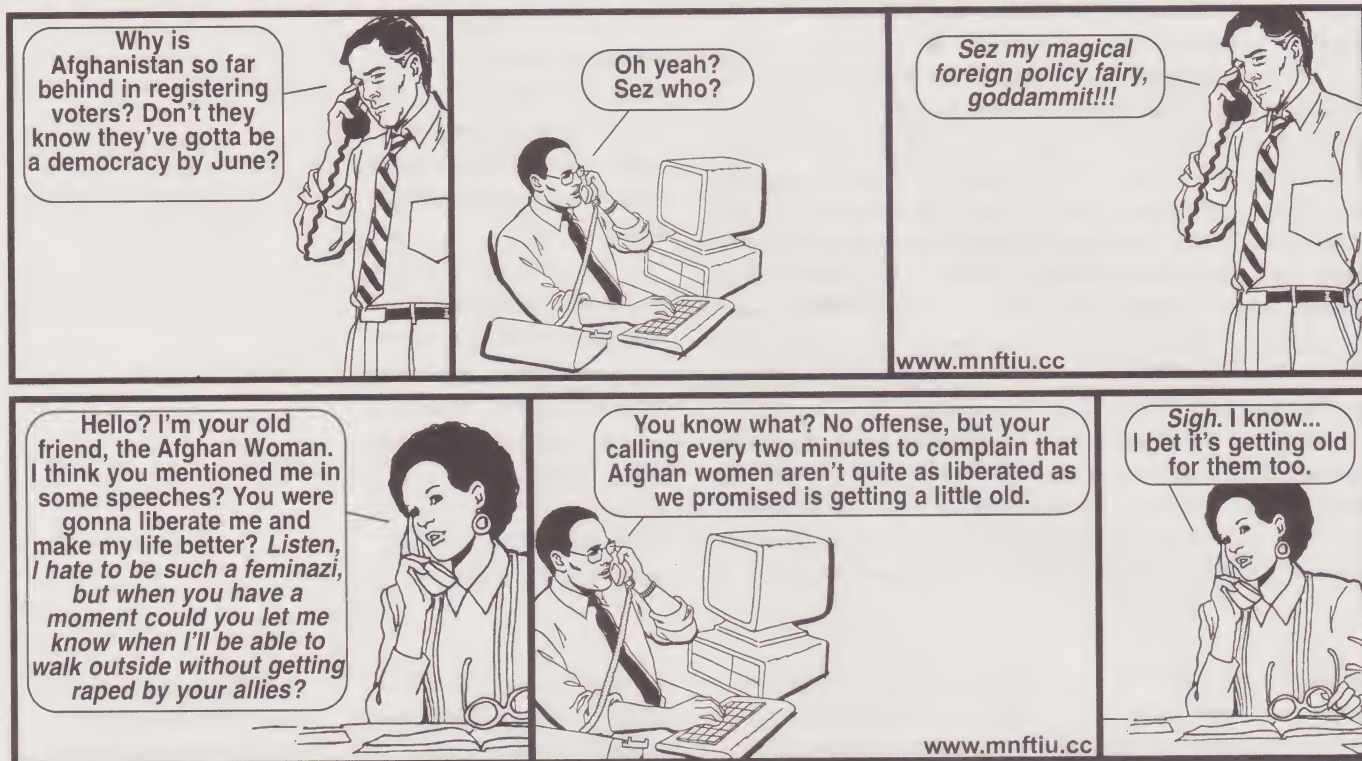
in a boonie farm house in pursuit of creating the record he's always dreamed about

making. The 30-year-old country/city mouse finds himself skittering between his home base Chicago and an rural Illinois barn, staying at each locale for enough time to keep himself sane and not so long as to make his next album seem like a novel taking an eternity to shine off. After last year's cloudless *Weather Systems* (Righteous Babe), many thought Bird's mission had already been accomplished. Hardly, he says.

"With *Weather Systems*, I wanted to make a really, really pretty record. With [2001's] *Swimming Hour*, I wanted a really rocking party record," he says. "All I've been wanting for the last five or six years is to be solid. Now's the time where I take what I've learned."

Straight out of music school, Bird would have done anything he could to avoid getting a day job. Learning to play violin at age four and eventually stepping up to the mic simultaneously has successfully led him from being the strings man in the late-90s quick-hit Squirrel Nut Zippers, to his first solo outing with Andrew Bird's Bowl of Fire, and now his fully solo efforts at home and abroad. Bird has found himself absorbed by folk traditions and pre-war '78s, Latin rhythms, and the imagery of the old world. Rest assured, he is engrossed with music—with many ideas spilling out in last year's record and that mystic promise of things to come.

Get Your War On BY DAVID REES



"Just listening to music is like listening to information. I'm not really available to be much of a listener," he says, "but I'm always working on a song in my head."

The quaintly pretentious bearings of the classical music world haven't departed from Bird's intricate and colorful songwriting. Many of *Weather Systems* songs had sharp-witted choir boy vocals lofting over string orchestras of pop, harmonies, whistling, the whole bit. Cuts like "Lull" are quirky and simplistic, while the title track drifts into a gypsy aria,

glowing and haunted. It is also no surprise that, for a man that spends much of his time in a barn the album came out charming, but perhaps a little distant.

Maybe Bird recognizes this when he sings, "Being alone can be quite romantic / Like Jacques Cousteau underneath the Atlantic / A fantastic voyage through parts unknown/ Going to depths where the sun's never shone / I fascinate myself / When I'm all alone." We can tell, Andrew.

Earlier this year, Andrew helped complete a

musical score of sorts to accompany a picture book that his mother, Beth, illustrated called *The Ballad of the Red Shoes*, the lyrics and music sculpted cutely to the story. Bird has big ideas of transferring this magical, children's approach to this year's album. Tentatively named *The Naming of Things*, Bird imagines a child protagonist, clad with cape, taking on the world Schoolhouse Rock-star style.

"He'll encounter all these amazing things popping up everywhere—scary things, from school to mad scientists. He'll be navigating values and

ideas, fighting concepts: Captain Rock," says Bird. Anticipating the victories of his album's conceptual hero, he grins—"I like Captain."

Bird hopes to have the final battles waged for a release this summer, perhaps abandoning some of his eight-day isolation drills. Of course, that'll take getting over a pretty big hurdle for the exacting Bird.

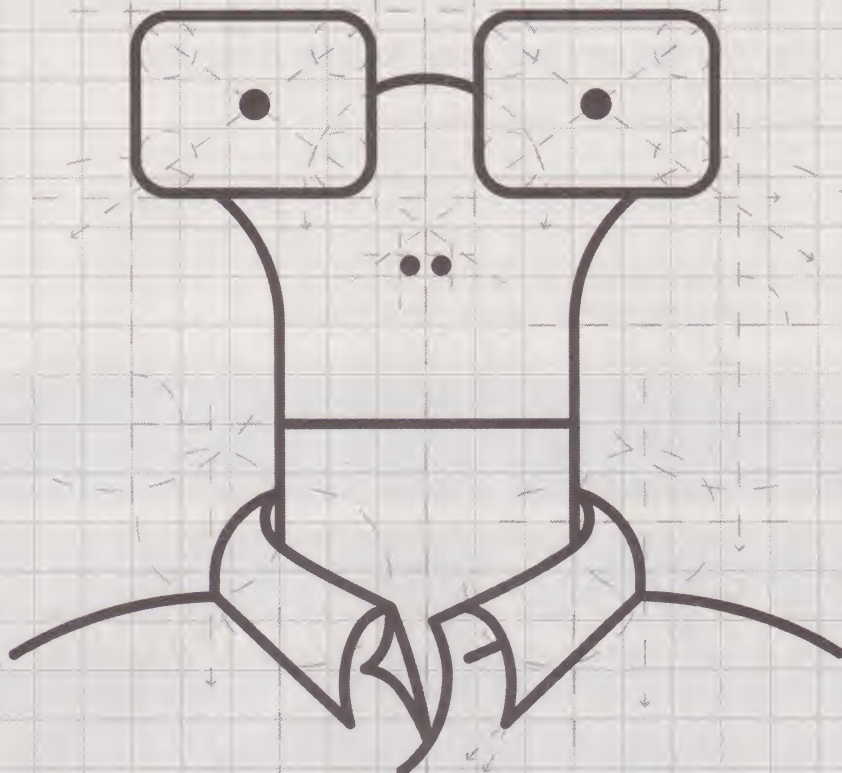
"The hard thing about being a perfectionist," he says, "is all the imperfection."

— Katie Hasty ©

The wonderful world of Andrew Bird is online at www.bowlofire.com

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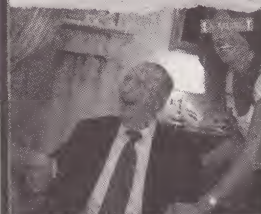
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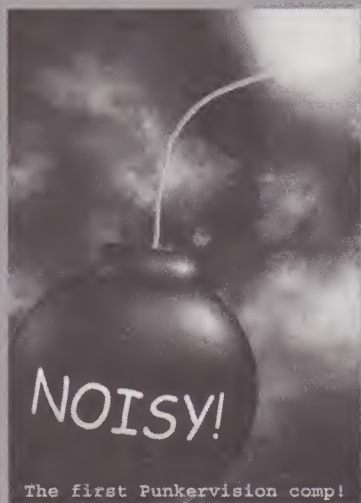
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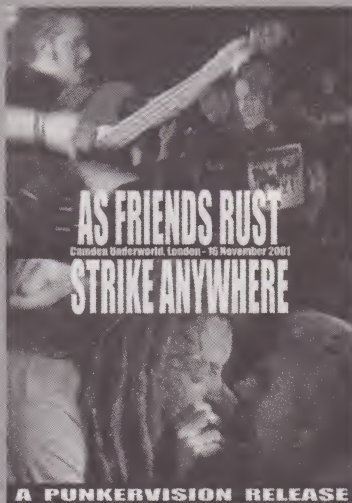
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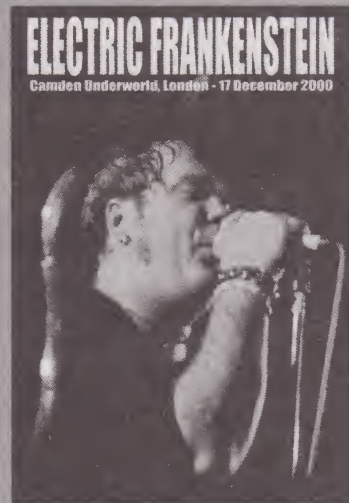


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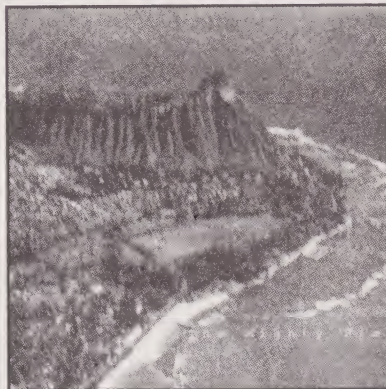
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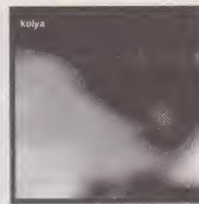
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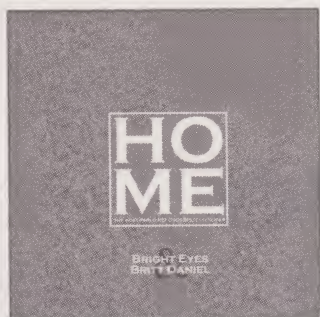
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Ian MacKaye

"If people—as you suggest in your question—feel that somehow the foundation has been shook because I've changed, fuck that. Fuck you all. I'm a human, not a *statue*."

When you ask someone "what's new?", it's usually automatic that the response will come back, "not much." Things just don't change all that much, especially not in the insular world of punk rock. Sure, bands break up and new ones form; labels fold and new ones crop up . . . But most of the time, it feels like it's all pretty predictable. There's rarely news that really throws you for a loop; no real surprises lurking behind dark corners. For punk rock, "what's new" quite often feels like the same old, same old.

The same can't be said for Ian MacKaye. It seems like for the Dischord Records founder and Fugazi frontman, *everything* is new. Last summer, whispers began to circulate that the 15-year-old Fugazi had broken up. Then came word that MacKaye had a new band when a single MP3 originally posted on Thurston Moore's Protest Records website began to circulate the 'net. Then the Dischord website announced that MacKaye had started a new record label called Northern Liberties. It was obvious that something was new.

The facts, as is often the case, are both less titillating and more curious than the rumors let on. Fugazi hasn't broken up; they are, however, on a long-term hiatus with no restart date in sight (though it is telling—and quite sad for those of us that were fans—that Ian uses the past-tense almost exclusively when talking about the band). There is a new band, the Evens, with former Warmers drummer Amy Farina; aside from that MP3 and a song for a pilot children's show (really), they haven't really gone public with shows or records. And yeah, there is a new label, but Dischord isn't going anywhere. Even still, for someone that still uses the same desk he's had since he was 19, MacKaye's shaking things up.

To speak with MacKaye is to realize that he couldn't be happier about it all. Animated and excited, he delivers his answers rapid-fire, punctuating his sentences with fierce gestures you can all but see through the telephone. He makes repeated references to feeling "hemmed in" by aspects of his legacy and he seems eager to confront them head on. And to hear the often gravely serious MacKaye tell it, he's having the time of his life.

Interview by **Daniel Sinker**

Photos by **Amy Farina**

I think when people think of you in the context of our community, it's as bedrock, as a foundation, as someone who is *solidly* doing things. I think people take for granted that you've been doing Dischord forever and that Fugazi will always be there. But all of a sudden, it now seems like there's this sea change: you've got a new record label, a new band, Fugazi's on hiatus . . .

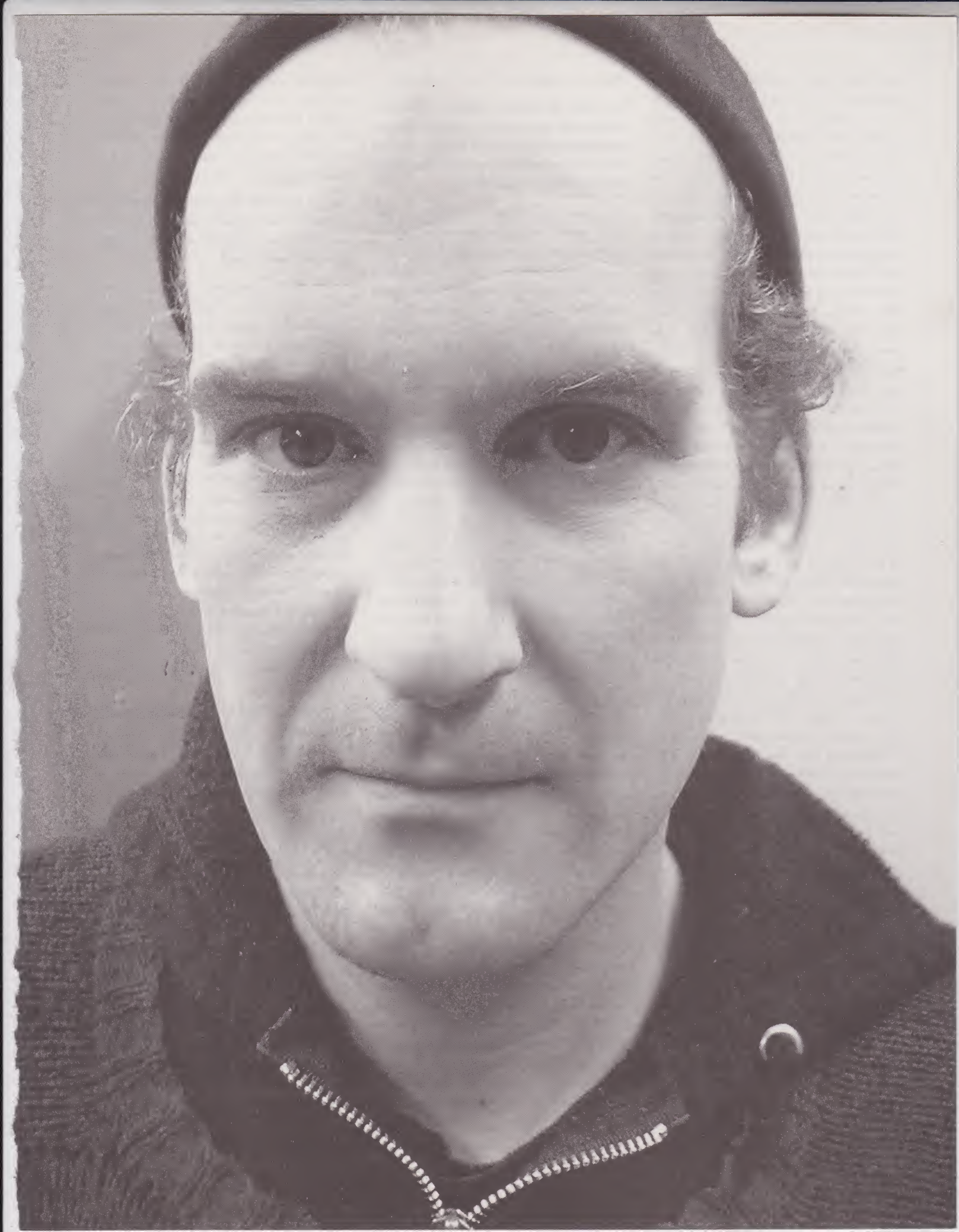
Why is that a change?

Well, it *feels* like a change.

Not to *me*. To me, it's a continuum. First off, the new label is not replacing *anything*. Dischord is totally thriving. But obviously Dischord can't put out *everything*. Having

another label was a way for me to help get music out that I think is cool but doesn't really make sense in terms of Dischord. The music I'm releasing on Northern Liberties is obscure and it's not something that I feel like exposing to this diseased and sickened air of the pop world. The commercial music media's filter is so focused on the music industry—the sales, the stores, the trends and all this kind of stuff—that I don't think reviewers are able to really sit down with a record and think of it in terms of *just* the idea. Putting music that is that obscure onto Dischord I think would expose that music to people who don't have time to try and figure

it out. Dischord is so *deeply* affiliated with Fugazi and Minor Threat to the point that virtually *every* review of any Dischord record will make a mention of it and find some tenuous way of connecting the sound—*oh, it's very Fugazi-esque*—no matter what. I just didn't feel like someone like Don Zientara recording songs that he's written over the last 30 or 40 years on a one-track tape recorder in the office of his studio, or Dan Higgs doing 35 minutes of jew's harp music, or Et Al II doing this incredibly crazy computer music played by humans, should have to be filtered that way. I just want it to exist. I don't give a fuck about sales, I just care about doc-



umenting it and if people can find some inspiration in it, that's great. God, if 50,000 people want to buy it, I'll make 50,000. But frankly, I'm making 500. This is merely a continuation of my original mission, which is to document music that strikes me as worth documenting. But this is not taking place at Dischord because—and this is something that I think you'll discover through your work with *Punk Planet*—at some point the identity of the entity gets in a tug of war between what you know it is and what everyone else *thinks* it is. So that's where things are with the label situation. ¶ In terms of what Fugazi's doing or not doing, that's *life*, man. I can tell you that for the last year, Fugazi has not played; we have not done any work at all. And I think it will be another year or two or five or 50 until we play again. I don't know. We don't break up because the reasons we aren't playing and the reasons we can't work are largely out of our control. Breaking up just seems absurd. We are a family and we're not angry with each other, it was just an issue of *life*. In the 15 years that we were driving around and doing work, there were things that had gone unattended and they needed to be looked after. I don't think people should make too much of it. I think people should celebrate that time continues to move and things continue to change and evolve and we'll see what happens with Fugazi. I'm at peace with whatever happens. We never gave up. We never stopped. We just did it our way. All the dilemmas that a band can run into—the hurdles and puzzles and conundrums that bands have to contend with as they become more popular—I think that we met each one head on and we figured out a way to get around it. But life and children, those are *not* puzzles and they are *not* conundrums—they are *reality*. We will see what happens. ¶ In my mind, I don't see myself as a foundational person, like you said. I can't think about it like that because that would be discouraging. I feel like I'm a living, moving, *progressing* person. If people—as you suggest in your question—feel that somehow the foundation has been shook because I've changed, fuck that. Fuck you all. I'm a human, not a *statue*. I feel more clear about my work now than I ever have. In my mind, I feel like things are still ahead of me. It's all still growth.

Nothing's packed up—I'm still unpacking.

You spoke of Northern Liberties in terms of freeing what you wanted to produce from the expectations people have of Dischord. Do you feel the same with your own music now—that it frees you from expectations?

Of course. One thing about Fugazi is that while I appreciate how much people supported us, at the same time when you play a show and you just *know* that you're a little bit off—that you're not firing on all cylinders—and everyone's just saying *brilliant, brilliant, brilliant*, you realize that the reputation of the band is again in a sort of tug of war. ¶ Also, in terms of Fugazi, I started to really feel frustrated because as the band got bigger, in order to be appropriate spaces, we usually ended up playing in commercial venues. Those are the places that you can perform loud music in and have people gather safely and legally. And the venues that can provide that sort of thing are, for the most part, bars. And if they're not bars, then they're part of the music industry—they are commercial music industry structures. And there is something, for me, that is *really* discouraging about that. I find the music industry to be really loathsome. It's a drag that music has been absorbed by music *business*. I see music as sacred. From my point of view, we had gotten to a point where the venues we were playing were getting harder and harder to come by. Clear Channel was buying up everybody and it was a challenge trying to wrestle music out of the hands of that kind of larger corporate thing. And beyond that, I felt that we were playing in venues whose economy is basically based on self-destruction. Now I don't want to suggest to anybody that any of these larger clubs are evil—they're not. They're great and the people who work there are great. I'm not trying to cast any aspersions. What I'm talking about are much more fundamental things. When I think of the *tens of thousands* of dollars we had to pay for insurance and security over the years and then we'd go to a show and the *only* thing I'd be thinking about was to intercede on every level before security got involved—I don't want security beating up some kids. Or when I think about the volume we played at and how the volume *itself* created a situation where people felt they could act out... These are all things I've thought about

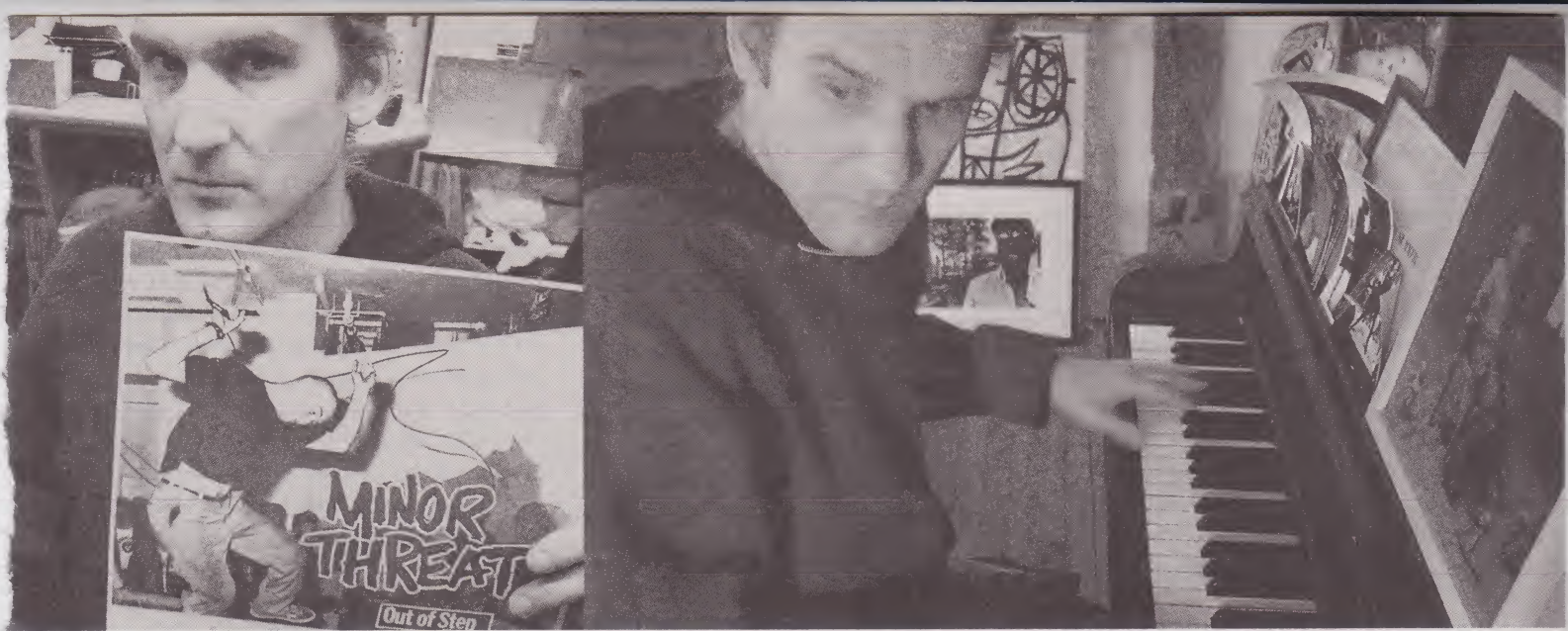
for years. As a result of that, of where we were as a band—and I love the band, I'll play any time—I often thought, "Wow, at some point I'm going to work on a project that does not require all this stuff." I am *extremely* interested in stepping outside of the circuit.

Do you think that it's possible for people to approach a new project of yours and not come with all of the baggage of all of the projects that have come before?

No, I don't. There were plenty of people who loved Minor Threat and thought Fugazi sucked. I don't care. The first three or four or five years of Fugazi at every show there were people who yelled *play Minor Threat*. I can deal with that. It's nothing new to me. But do I think it's possible? I do think it's possible that somebody doesn't know about all of my other projects—I once met a person who only had one Fugazi album, *Instrument*, and he came to see us on the basis that we were an instrumental band. It's possible that there will be some people out there in the world who are not familiar with Minor Threat, Embrace, Fugazi, or the Warmers—which was Amy's band. But largely, it's contextual. There are people who will understand the context and the kind of work that I'm involved with—it's a liberation theology, I'm always pushing to be free. I don't want anybody to hem me in.

But, with your want to work outside of established venues, I wonder how easy it would be for a new band featuring Ian MacKaye to play a smaller venue because of the number of people that would want to come see it.

When Fugazi first toured in 1987, I was already very well known in the punk world. And on Fugazi's first tours, we went out of our way to make sure that people did not put "ex-Minor Threat" on the flyers. We did a tour with no record out, and we just went around the country and played really small places. There were some places where people knew, and it was a little bit ridiculous—they were too small—but then we'd play in Spokane in a little art gallery with 22 kids there. That was great. The idea was to lay roots. I think that bands that rely on the reputation of their previous work—when they use it to pull them along—they run into a bit of a problem. You say, "Oh I



“There are people who will understand the context and the kind of work I’m involved with—it’s a liberation theology. I’m always pushing to be free. I don’t want anybody to hem me in.”

was in this band,” or “featuring members of that band.” Think of it as a horse pulling you in a carriage: at some point that horse will die, and then you’ll have to pull that motherfucker along with you. Fugazi from the beginning, while we would have had bigger shows if we had used the Minor Threat tag or Rites of Spring tag, we were really committed to being Fugazi. ¶ Now, I have an enormous amount of experience. I’ve been doing this for many, many years, so I feel like I can pull this off. But also, I’m stubborn and I’m *not* kidding around.

So how does that manifest itself then?

We’ll find out. I’m not there yet and I don’t talk about things I haven’t done. You asked me about the constrictions of Fugazi and that was my main constriction. Having said all that, Fugazi is an *important* band for me. That band in my heart can never die. I was not casting any aspersions, it was just a pickle of a situation. In terms of the Evens, we may play some shows, we may play a lot of shows, we may play one show. I don’t know. We’ll find out. I will say this: Amy and I, we make music, we play music, and I like it. It feels really honest.

How is the process of making music with the Evens different than making music with Fugazi?

I’ve never been in a band with just one other person, so the dialogue is entirely different.

With Fugazi, you have four people all of whom have really intense musical tastes and have all played for quite a while. Everything we wrote, we did together as a band. Nobody brought in a finished song and said “Here it is!” We’d go in the basement and kick the shit out of everything; just kick it around the room until something makes sense. With two people, I think that the dynamic is really different. It’s a totally different way of writing because both of us can bring in ideas and we’ll try anything. That’s the way you lay the roots: You just play.

How did the band come about?

I’ve known Amy for many, many years. She moved here from Pennsylvania in 1990 or ’91. She was in the Warmers with my brother—I recorded them and Fugazi played with them a number of times. Five or six years ago, we had just seen a show together and were really energized by the performance. We were like, “We should play music together!” One thing about Fugazi was there were periods when we’d practice four times a week, but then there were other times that we weren’t working on music at all. There were periods of time where I’d go months without even playing music, so the idea of being able to play in such a low-pressure sense was something I really desired. A couple years ago, Amy and I went down into the

basement and started playing music together. When you start to play music with someone, you tend to think of their style and how it will mesh with your style. I had been with Brendan and Joe and Guy for so long, it was hard for me to imagine how my style would mesh with anybody’s. But as it turned out, because there was no pressure and we both just wanted to play music, it worked out really well. It’s like a conversation. You might have a really interesting conversation with one person and then you might meet another person and have a conversation with them that is completely different but equally as fascinating. That’s music.

I’m curious about doing something as long as Fugazi and then moving into this new thing. When we did our last interview, you said you “wake up every day” in that band . . .

I think I still wake up in that band to some degree.

I’m curious about the experience of one day waking up and feeling *whoa*—there are all these different avenues.

It’s a little bit staggering to consider all the things I can do because suddenly I’m not thinking about all the things that were on the horizon involving Fugazi. But the fact is, while I played guitar and sang in Fugazi, I was also the administrator of Fugazi. I dealt with a lot of business stuff and that still con-

tinues. So I'm still completely involved in a lot of Fugazi business, but it is a relief being clear about the band. We have taken breaks in the past, but this is the first time that we've said "There is nothing on the horizon; there is no time limit." I think there have been a couple periods of time during the years when we didn't know what was happening. It was a little bit daunting because you didn't want to get involved in something else because you didn't want to have to stop. So I think that by being clear with each other, everyone feels like they can pursue this or that. It has had an incredible effect, I think.

So what are the other guys doing?

Brendan is here in town and he's been working on soundtrack and commercial stuff. He's also been playing with Garland of Hours, a small band he's in with Jerry Busher and Amy Domingues. He's playing bass and guitar, and seems to be enjoying getting out from behind the drums. ¶ Joe's living out in LA. He moved out there with his wife and daughter—I don't know if it's permanent or not, but they had things they needed to do out there. He just did a small performance with John Frusciante from the Chili Peppers and this guy Josh. They've also done some recording, but I'm not sure what the plans are for the tapes. One other thing Joe is doing is putting together this Fugazi live CD series. Joe is setting up a website where he's putting up 20 live shows to start with and if people are interested in a particular show, they can order it and he'll make a CD for them. It's still in the early stages of design, but hopefully we'll figure out a way to make all of our recorded shows available—we have somewhere close to 1000. ¶ Guy has been involved in a number of different projects. One thing he did was play in a jazz festival in Austria—he had been invited by members of the Ex to come out and play in this jazz ensemble. I wasn't there—I wish I had been—but he said it was incredible. He produced the new Blonde Redhead record as well as the Casual Dots album. He and I are working with Jem Cohen—who did the Instrument movie—on his new movie, *Chain*. Guy is also overseeing the remastering of all the Fugazi records. I just heard the remastering of *Repeater* yesterday and it sounds incredible. The technology of CD mastering

has improved exponentially—the records just sound *miles* better than they've ever sounded. We're remastering all of the CDs—except for *The Argument*, which was released after the technology was available.

It's interesting to hear about the Fugazi remasterings. You talk a lot about moving forward, but at the same time you seem very respectful of your past—remastering the albums, releasing the Minor Threat DVD. Is it simply that you want to see your old material preserved in as good a format as possible, or is there something more there?

It's two things. One is that the label would not exist were it not for the bands and their music. So I am committed to honoring the music and the bands that have made this thing possible. If we can improve upon the sound of the CDs, then we will. We're not just remastering Fugazi stuff, we've remastered probably 20 or 30 different titles now. As we've had to repress stuff, we've remastered it. The idea is to honor the music. ¶ Like the Dischord box set. People have told Dischord that the way we do things is too idealistic; that we'd have to "get real" sooner or later; that we'd have to accept the American business plan. I feel like the box set is proof that that is *bullshit*; that it can be done in different ways. And the music is what made that possible for us, so the idea was to show the *true* foundation of the label: all these people who have entrusted us with their music. ¶ Which brings me to the other aspect of why I go back and work on things like this: I don't disavow anything that I've ever done. Life is a flight of steps and every step is *necessary*. So for me, I'm still in Minor Threat. I don't have an issue with that. There's not a single lyric that I've written that I won't take responsibility for. Those bands are a part of me.

So life is a series of steps. Looking down, are there moments that you can see decisions you made that, knowing what you know now, you would have made differently?

I think it was CS Lewis who made a metaphor about life as a tree: every decision you make is a branch and once you're on that branch, you can make other decisions and it'll split again to other branches, but if you're on the wrong branch, it doesn't make a difference what you do because every decision you make will be wrong—you

have to go back to the trunk. That's something I *have* thought about. There have been times in my life where I think about decisions I've made and I realize I can never correct it until I make decisions that will bring me back to the trunk. And so I've done that. ¶ For instance, I used to fight. I used to fight *a lot*. Back in 1979 when I was getting involved in punk, it was a new culture that was *exploding* out of a much larger dominant culture that *did not* like it. Because of this eruption, there were *enormous* amounts of friction and that evolved into violence. It was violence that, at that point, I felt very clearly in my mind was worth fighting. We were not going to keep getting beat up by rednecks and marines anymore, we were going to step up defend ourselves. But the violence that occurred, it became increasingly more ingrained in the punk identity and people started coming to punk shows thinking that violence was *the* behavior of punks. There was a period of time where I must have fought at *every* show. By 1984 or 1985 in Washington DC the shows, which at one point had been a collection of weird, marginalized miscreants and cooks, men and women, boys and girls—it was a wide open free space where all these people could exist—had slowly transformed into this gathering of thugs, basically. I didn't make the connection at first, but then I confronted this skinhead and he said to me "We're just defending the scene the way you used to do it." This was *profound* to me. It was clear to me at that moment that I had lost the plot. I had this idea that violence was a form of really direct communication and was a way of underscoring the sincerity of the music. But ultimately what was happening was that people were getting *stomped*. That's when I said I will not fight, and I will not have people fighting at my shows. It's so funny because people see that as me wanting to be the boss of everybody. [laughs] But from my point of view, it was me taking responsibility for my actions. I confronted what I felt I had contributed to. I don't know when you started going to shows, but in the late '80s, violence was pretty prevalent. And I have to say that at punk shows now, if you see a fight, it's so unusual—it's crazy. I think that shows that you can change things and that things can



“Having been involved in punk for 25 years now, I have seen that culture change and evolve over and over and over again. And it can never die, because it is always open for definition.”

change. ¶ I think that assholes are a virus and they will never completely go away. During the '80s, people thought that the way to fight the virus was to fight the violent people. But you could eradicate every one of them and there would be a thousand more. All you can really hope to do is to create a situation where the virus can not comfortably exist: you create a new culture. Having been involved in punk for 25 years now, I have seen that culture change and evolve over and over and over again. And it can never die, because it is always open for definition.

I think you have contemporaries from 25 years ago who would disagree with you. They would insist that the stuff happening now *isn't* punk and that punk *doesn't* evolve. I think it's interesting that that's your definition of punk because I believe that, ultimately, that is also your definition of your own creative output: that it evolves and it changes.

Of course. It's *life*. It's *always* change. When people talk to me about their preference for the past, that speaks to their situation. In my mind, I'm always much more interested in the present because the present is really the only time that has any hope of doing anything. The past can not change anything and the future does not exist, so the present is the only thing that has any real hope. If people don't want to be involved in music or in punk, that's cool, but that's them; that's where they pull off. Think of it as a highway,

like you're driving across I-80—it's like saying punk is Gary, Indiana or punk is Toledo, Ohio—wherever they pull off, they go, “That's it.” But I guess I don't see it as a finite path. I've been blown away time and time again by the innovation. ¶ I really see punk as alive because there are *always* going to be people who are making music for the very first time. That's always going to happen because people are always being born. There's always new people. *Always*. There's always going to be this point where they pick up instruments to play music for the first time. As they struggle with these instruments and try to figure out how to make noise out of them, they are usually inspired by music that has come before them. They will try in their way to replicate that music, but because they're not the people who made it and because it's not the same time and because their relationships with their instruments are so unique, the music they make will *never* sound like that band—it will be innovation. They will find out that they made something new. ¶ I think that new ideas need a free space in which people can present their ideas—whether they're musical, literary, or visual. A new idea has no audience, and since there is no audience, there is no profit. And that's why nightclubs that require profit tend to not be the best petri dish for new ideas. They tend to reinforce redundancy, if you ask me, because to get people

into a room you have to play music that is reassuring. Nightclubs provide a service which is great, but the ideas they present *have* to be redundant to some degree. When I think of my early punk experiences, we played our first show in a basement, and then we played a commune, and in art galleries. Those are free spaces. ¶ And this brings us back to back to the beginning of our conversation about Fugazi and the Evens and Northern Liberties and all that other stuff. The irony is that as we became louder—as volume became *so* symbolic of powerful music—it created a situation where we became indentured in a way. Volume relegates us to certain kinds of environments. And volume also provides a mask for inappropriate behavior—I've had the experience time and time again when Fugazi would play something quiet and then we'd play loud and everyone would start fighting. Now, I'm not against volume—I *love* volume—but I think that as music people, we have sold ourselves short because we equate the power of *music* with the power of *volume*. And because of that—because of volume—it has made free spaces much more difficult. Imagine if you were trying to put together a show and not have to worry about having a PA? How much easier would it be to find a venue? A lot easier. [laughs] This is something that I've been doing a lot of thinking about, but I'm just a punk motherfucker. ©

As *Punk Planet* celebrates its 10th year, Sleater-Kinney is quietly reaching the decade mark themselves. Currently immersed in writing their seventh record, the band is generally avoiding the press and not making a big fuss over the milestone.

That's not to say each of them—guitarist/vocalist Carrie Brownstein, guitarist/vocalist Corin Tucker, and drummer Janet Weiss—hasn't thought about it. As they slowly gather material to build a new record, Sleater-Kinney find themselves in unfamiliar, and somewhat unnerving, territory: where to go next?

It goes without saying that the band's large and devoted following is waiting for an answer with bated breath. Since their inception in 1994, Sleater-Kinney has grown to be considered one of America's most important bands, sustaining a prominence that transcends the close-knit independent community the band calls home.

Each of their records—*Sleater-Kinney* (1995), *Call The Doctor* (1996), *Dig Me Out* (1997), *The Hot Rock* (1999), *All Hands On The Bad One* (2000), and *One Beat* (2002)—has taken them down different paths and made them more successful. They routinely sell out 1,000-plus capacity venues (even with consecutive shows in one city) and did a stint opening

for Pearl Jam last year. They have been praised by critics many times over and been the focus of features in such high-profile outlets as *Time* magazine, NPR, *Rolling Stone*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, not to mention a near-endless list of alternative media outlets.

Sleater-Kinney has grown accustomed to the attention, but the three bandmates have managed to avoid fame's destructive side effects for the most part. In the aftermath of the hype that followed *Dig Me Out*, the band enjoyed quickly rising popularity. Many bands discover that the harsh glare of the limelight can bring about an identity crisis, and Sleater-Kinney encountered similar issues as their record sales increased. But when faced with those issues, Sleater-Kinney didn't turn to drug/alcohol addiction, backstabbing, or other *Behind The Music* clichés—they went to couples therapy instead.

After enduring their own dark period, the band re-established communication with each other and their needs as people and musicians. The women of Sleater-Kinney realized that their friendship came first and the band quickly moved to neutralize anything that threatened that dictum.

The band has also learned to be flexible. In 2001 Tucker and her husband, Lance Bangs,

had a son, Marshall. Pregnancy entailed a mandatory break from Sleater-Kinney that continued when Marshall was born nine weeks premature. His birth also signaled a change in the band's usual operating procedures, most notably with touring. While the band toured several months for 2002's *One Beat*, the trips came intermittently so Tucker wouldn't be away from home for too long or so her son and husband could accompany the band.

The slower pace has given everyone more time to develop lives outside of Sleater-Kinney: Tucker stays home with her son; Brownstein has acted in a couple of films; Weiss also plays in Quasi, releasing the album *Hot Shit!* last year. After doing the band for 10 years, the members of Sleater-Kinney have discovered that the balance provided by such outside activities is essential to the band's survival. They have abandoned the "band is everything" mantra, and because of that they're not only still speaking to each other, but writing strong music.

Sleater-Kinney took a break from writing their next album to talk about how they've made it work and what being together for a decade means—and *doesn't* mean—to them.

Interview by **Kyle Ryan**

Illustration by Christopher Silas Neal, Photos by Megan Holmes

SLEATER KINNEY



When you try something new, it's really frustrating. You're sort of trying all your old tricks, but they don't work. You have to figure out the new secret. It's part of the process of doing things for more than two years. The first two years, creativity *explodes* out of you. But after 10 years, you're mining this part of yourself that is untapped...There's a lot of banging your head against the wall.



So, 10 years. You've spent a decade doing interviews like this one and saying the same things over and over again. What are you all talked out about?

Weiss: [laughs] Riot Girl, I guess. [Carrie and Corin] were more involved in the budding of Riot Girl. I'm not tired of Riot Girl, I'm just tired of talking about it in relation to this band.

Tucker: I'm kind of all talked out about Riot Girl and the music industry. I'm really all talked out about *everything*, actually. It's unfortunate that so many journalists, they read our press and then sort of regurgitate it. They ask the *same* questions then write the *same* sorts of things that one journalist would write.

Brownstein: I'm talked out about how it feels to be a woman playing music. My response to this question has just become "This is how it feels: you get asked that question being a woman playing music." I can't imagine any man has ever been asked how it feels to be a man playing music, and why did he choose to play music with only men. I'm not saying we're post-feminist,

or we transcend our gender; I'm just waiting for a more complex and interesting way of talking about music and gender and sexuality and politics.

Have you thought about the 10-year milestone much, or is it not that big of a deal?

Brownstein: Yes, we have thought about it. I feel like we're going through a midlife crisis. It's daunting to feel that there's a lot behind us and it's intense to feel that certain albums that we feel very close to and feel are big turning points for the band are now many, many years behind us. So I think that we're excited, and we're trying to look at it as a means of pressing a "reset" button. But it's intense. You totally move into a different category of bands. We're that band when you go into the bin at the record store, you're like, "Oh my god, there are *so many* records!"

It's probably better than being a band that has one CD and broke up after getting huge. You've been around long enough now to see your fair share of bands and trends come and go.

Brownstein: It's fascinating to watch because if you stick around long enough, things come back around. We've been fortunate because we sit on the periphery of that. To be able to sit on the side and not be caught up in the capriciousness or vicissitudes of the industry, or feel that we're being tossed around, or that now we need to work on *this*, that's been nice. But it's certainly interesting to watch as bands come and go. In 10 years, you watch as a band starts out, gets huge, breaks up—and you're still there.

They're not around long enough to face a midlife crisis. What did you mean when you said you think the band is going through one?

Brownstein: I think personally that I've never felt such pressure to push myself as a guitar player. I don't want to reinvent the wheel—I don't want to make a reggae album or anything—but when I play something

that recalls or sounds like something I've already done, I feel like I need to stop and approach it differently.

Weiss: Honestly, I feel like I'm sort of at some weird crossroads as a musician where I want to try to dig deeper into my musical abilities, but at the same time, probably the best way I can communicate is by doing what I do. I get torn between trying to do something new and also trying not to get too bogged down with that, because it can be really stifling.

You mean getting bogged down with constantly trying to change things?

Weiss: Like trying to get better all the time and like practicing and concentrating on things I *can't* do instead of concentrating on things I *can* do. Finding a balance between those, that's the important thing. Always trying to learn things you can't do is kind of overwhelming.

Tucker: It's a big deal that we're making our seventh record. It's really important for us to think of our musical career as a whole and not to think about what we have to do differently so that we don't do anything we've done before. It's definitely a challenge.

How has writing the new album compared to its predecessors?

Brownstein: It's slower. We found that true on *One Beat* as well, which in some ways paid off.

Weiss: When you try something new, it's really frustrating. You're sort of trying all your old tricks, but they don't work. You have to figure out the new secret. It's part of the process of doing things for more than two years. The first two years, creativity *explodes* out of you. But after 10 years, you're mining this part of yourself that is untapped. You don't have the tools for doing it, so you have to figure out what they are. There's a lot of banging your head against the wall.

Tucker: I have a very different life now. I

have a lot less time to write music than when I was a 20-year-old obsessing over it. I think that I appreciate it more once we are in the writing process. We have more experience now to draw on when we're writing. We spend a lot more time on our songs now. We're able to try and do a lot of different stuff.

Weiss: We're all sort trying to figure out how we get to this new place. How do we write in a way that's going to facilitate these new ideas? The last record was really hard, but I think we accomplished a lot as far as that's concerned.

But do you think the slower writing process—while tougher—has been a good thing for you?

Weiss: It's not always like it is on your first record. It's really important to be able to redefine yourself in music if you're going to stick around for 10 years. We can't just pretend like we're 22 and make a record a year and make the same record over and over. That's not really that interesting to us, and it really never has been. Each record has been a reaction to the last record. That still happens.

Brownstein: We try to write for a few months, then play a few shows and go back. That's been helpful. It's not necessarily how the audience reacts—because usually the audience prefers to hear your old songs and always have a more tempered response to the new songs—but there's something about playing them outside the basement. You can feel the energy change just for a moment and that's where the song needs help.

Speaking of writing, in the past, the band had taken a bit of criticism for not being political enough. But *One Beat* definitely had political overtones. Was that more of a reaction to September 11 and the Bush administration, or do you think your new work will have similar themes?

Brownstein: I think certainly with that record, which we were writing at that time, it

felt impossible to ignore. Trying to write music at first felt futile then felt *completely* necessary and therefore addressed everything that was going on. But I feel our music has been political to varying degrees from the beginning. We consider ourselves a political band as well as many other things; I try not to define us using one word. We're a political band and a rock band and a punk band; they all sort of exist at once and our records seem to reflect that. Even on *One Beat*, there was a song like "Oh!" that was completely poppy and sort of a love song. ¶ Certainly right now I think if you have a chance to stand on a stage with a microphone, and you have a chance to reach people or talk to people, there's really no reason *not* to be political. I definitely feel like it's dark times. I don't think I can get on stage and *not* have that affect how I feel when I play or how intense it sometimes feels to be among 1,000 or 2,000 people. That is an intense feeling, and to be able to bring a sense of urgency, politics, or even joy, that to me is very important. To not have it at all reflect what's going on outside the doors of a venue, that's very bizarre to me.

Corin, earlier you mentioned something about having a very different life now. The difference between the person who recorded your self-titled record in 1995 and the one who's chasing around a toddler now must feel pretty drastic.

Tucker: It's very drastic. It's amazing. I just don't think you realize how much you've changed in 10 years.

How have you guys adjusted as a band to that?

Tucker: I think that in general we've been able to juggle it fairly well. The hardest thing is touring. For sure it's more difficult now, but we've been able to do a lot.

Like taking your son out with you for parts of the tours?

Tucker: He really likes to socialize and run around and wreak havoc, and he gets to

watch the band. And it's really important that he sees me as a woman who has this powerful career and is talented. Whenever he sees someone with an electric guitar, he says "Mommy!"

Brownstein: I think it was hard for her at the beginning. "How can I soundcheck when I can see my child crying, even though there's a nanny or my husband's there?" Now it definitely seems like she appreciates it so much more, just to be able to get on stage at night. She feels lucky that she still has both. Having Marshall there brings a sense of normality to tour. It's nice. Tour's a very insular and often surreal experience. It's completely unlike normal life. In some ways, it's nice to have a person from the more staid, more normal part of your life there. It's kind of like a reality check.

Weiss: The downside is just that the tours are shorter; just when you start kicking into gear after the first week or week and a half, you only have another week left. Physically you just get in shape, and then you just have to stop. For me it takes at least four shows to get my blisters and calluses out of the way. I have to work myself back into the momentum.



But it sounds like you all have adjusted pretty well.

Brownstein: I think in some ways that has been very beneficial for us. First and foremost being forced to take about a year and half off made us remember why we *need* this band and why we *love* this band. If that hadn't happened, I don't know if we'd still be a band, and I don't know if we'd have the same perspective and enjoyment when we return to it after the break. We felt a sense of renewed spirit and energy and remembered that we have a chemistry that we don't really have with other people when we play with them. ¶ Another thing that came about was the realization that the only way to continue to do this band for more than 10 years is to have other things in our lives that are important. Corin sort of forced the issue, but it made Janet and I realize it's OK if we spend half our time or part of our time pursuing other things. I think for longevity you need there to be a balance at some point; otherwise you're just going to hate each other and only write songs about tour.

Weiss: I think that because the writing is personal, there has to be something personal happening other than the band to write about. There have to be experiences and time away to sort of be able to internalize what's happened. The three of us all do that in really different ways. It would be impossible to do all of that together. We need to get away from each other every now and then [laughs] and just forget about Sleater-Kinney for a while. That's really important.

Can you ever really get away from it, though? You all have been doing this for so long that people intrinsically identify you with Sleater-Kinney—like you're "Janet from Sleater-Kinney." The band name follows your name. How much of your identity is tied to the band—and does that ever freak you out?

Brownstein: That's something I think about

a lot. I especially think about it in the sense of what happens when I'm not in this band. When you start out, you see yourself as having multiple identities, and most of your friends see you as having multiple identities. I would imagine it'd be the same with any career—you're a few years into it and suddenly that's who you are, whether you're in a band or in retail. In some ways it's been a difficult and sort of strange realization to make; to step back and say, "Is this who I am, and is this what I wanted? What does it mean for myself when I'm not doing this anymore?" So much of playing music is being in the public, performing and forging a connection with people in a very public space. When you don't have that, or when I think about leaving that, what will I do? What are the things that I've become dependent on and accustomed to, and what are the things I'd be maybe ready to go without?

Weiss: I am in Sleater-Kinney, and that's a big part of me, but that's definitely not all of me. I'm also "Janet from Quasi" and "Janet the drummer" and "Janet the dog-lover." I'm all these other things too.

Tucker: I think that, when *Dig Me Out* came out, that for me was the biggest change—suddenly having a public persona and a stage persona that people really felt they knew. To feel some sense of responsibility to people I didn't know was really difficult for me. But I feel like I kind of worked that out. I feel like we're so fortunate to have the connection with people that we do, because our shows are *amazing*. When I go see live music with other bands, even for other bands that are really popular and sell a lot of records, I don't see that same personal connection.

That connection's so powerful, but I could see how it could feel like baggage at times.

Tucker: I think it is a lot of responsibility in some ways. Sometimes I felt like it was almost too much to deal with—that these

people needed so much attention. But I think that in times when the band has struggled, or the band has felt like we didn't know which direction we were going in, that kind of attention from the fans really helped us. I think it's a two-way street.

What about when it's not enough? Have you guys thought about what happens after Sleater-Kinney?

Tucker: That's a really good question, and I have been really irresponsible with it. Honestly, I don't really want to think about what I would do after Sleater-Kinney because Sleater-Kinney is so much fun, and anything else would just be not as fun. I haven't really made up a backup career.

Weiss: I think I've always known that no matter how successful your band is, there's going to come a time when you have to get a job again. That's just a fact. If you're not realistic enough to understand that, you're going to be upset when that time rolls around. I'll miss playing in such a powerful band. The problem will be going to a show and seeing something that reminds me of Sleater-Kinney and feeling like I miss it. That will be the biggest problem. Hopefully it won't happen for awhile.

Brownstein: I have to say sometimes the regularity of a normal, straight job seems completely appealing. I do not take what I do for granted—we are very fortunate and lucky, and I'm not saying that someone sitting with a nine to five job is luckier than me—but there is an insecurity in this kind of career where you don't really know what's coming up next, and it has to be generated by you. If we don't make another record, then we don't tour, you know? Everything's kind of dependent on our own creative health and abilities. So if you feel stuck, there's no one saying you can kind of coast it all out. That's very hard.

Weiss: I'm not really too worried about it. But I guess the general plan is not to push

As long as you still need your music, chances are somebody else needs it too. If you stop needing your music, then you have to call into question whether other people need it as well. That's what we've continued to do, and when we don't need it anymore, maybe we'll hang it up and get office jobs.

things when they shouldn't be pushed; to be able to read what's happening. It's funny because both of the bands I'm in, we've worked through our personal problems and the things that irritate us about the band. We've sort of problem-solved. I can't imagine that Sleater-Kinney is going to get in a giant fight and break up.

It wasn't always like that, though. You guys had some hard times a few years back.

Weiss: For sure we've been pushed to the brink. There have been times when we didn't get along, and it almost didn't seem worth it because we weren't happy.

When was this?

Weiss: Probably around *The Hot Rock* era. After *The Hot Rock* came out and we had been touring for that record, that was probably the closest we came to breaking up.

This was when you sought out the seemingly unprecedented step of couples counseling?

Tucker: That was back after *Dig Me Out*. It was a long time ago. It was the pressure of suddenly becoming this successful band; it really brought things to a head in terms of where are we going and what did we really want from being in a band? Did we want to be rich and famous? Did we want to sign to a major label? We had to answer all these questions internally. We really didn't want to be on the plan of "the corporate band"—it's so not what we wanted to be about. We wanted to be these independent, free-thinking musicians and do something that was really different and to be seen as really thoughtful and talented people and not have it be about some image. We prioritized that and made *The Hot Rock*.

Weiss: Once we relieved the pressure and sort of understood that we all loved the band and wanted to keep doing the band, then it just became a rebuilding process: how do we reconnect with the music? How do we reconnect with each other? What are

the things we have to do not to be overwhelmed and not feel like quitting? We went through every aspect of the band and tried to loosen the tension. I guess it worked. We realized it's our friendship that really matters—at this point we're a family. That sort of takes precedent over getting a record out at this time. You become less selfish, I think, as the band keeps going.

Brownstein: We stay relevant by maintaining a friendship and still getting along and still having there be something that is real and making it so there's still a connection between us, so that we're not three shells of people on stage going through the motions.

Weiss: These are people I have this musical connection with. You just don't find that that often, and I happen to have three people I've found that with. Just because someone turns on the blow dryer in the morning and wakes me up, I'm not giving up my musical connection for that. There are just some logical things that need to be figured out along the way.

Janet, you mentioned you don't picture Sleater-Kinney having a huge fight and breaking up. How do you picture it ending?

Weiss: In a way, I feel like it'll never end. I could see us not making a record for five years and then being like, "Let's make a record." I don't think this band will ever be totally over, but I could see someone moving away, and that would be a hard thing to get around. How do I see it ending? I guess I don't yet.

It seems, though, when bands reach a certain age, people—the press especially—almost anticipate their break up, like they're memorializing someone who isn't gone yet. It feels that way with Fugazi, like people are just waiting for them to break up already so we can start extolling their legacy.

Weiss: You have to really ignore that. I can't imagine them saying "Fugazi is done forev-



er." There's just too much there to leave it. There might come a time in six months, a year, or 10 years when it just has to happen again. But because it's such a youth-oriented genre, people are supposed to be done at a certain point.

You don't appear to be done.

Weiss: It just doesn't feel like we're done yet. The challenge of feeling like, "What are we going to do next? How do we go about making something really great?" That's all really good. That, to me, is what my life is about. I don't have kids. Music is how I leave my mark on the world. I don't want to just retire and become a tour manager.

Brownstein: As long as you still need your music, chances are somebody else needs it too. If you stop needing your music, then you have to call into question whether other people need it as well. That's what we've continued to do, and when we don't need it anymore, maybe we'll hang it up and get office jobs. ©

I DIDN'T GET KILLED, I DIDN'T GET THE FLESH-EATING BACTERIA, I DIDN'T GET IN THE VAN WRECK, BUT THAT'S JUST DUMB LUCK.

MIKE WATT

THERE ARE A LOT OF CATS THAT AREN'T HERE TODAY THAT WERE TRYING THEIR HARDEST. UNFORTUNATELY, SHIT HAPPENED. AND JUST BECAUSE IT DIDN'T HAPPEN TO ME SO MUCH, I COULD HAVE JUST AS EASILY MISSED THE BOAT.

Virginia-born Mike Watt is as San Pedro as they come these days. "Pedro," as everyone calls the little port town south of Los Angeles, used to be spray painted on Watt's bass—everyone thought it was his name. These days, there's no confusion: he's on a first-name basis with the punk houses on 4th Street; he's playing a benefit for the DIY San Pedro skatepark; he's recording his newest album just blocks away from the building where he played his first show ever with the Reactionaries—when was that, 1977? Doesn't matter—he still remembers exactly where it was. Care for a history lesson? Over carnitas tacos at Jolly Burrito, it's Watt's operas and word-crams made real life, with the idealism, wit, and iconoclasm that goes all the way back to the Minutemen set gentle but potent in conversation.

The Minutemen's *Double Nickels On The*

Dime was released 20 years ago this year; instinctively, Watt will say that it's the best record he ever played on. He's right and then some: 20 years past, *Double Nickels* pokes out of the morass of the hardcore hum of the first low stirrings of those alternative-nation years and points towards a template and ideal for punk—for art, really—left a little blurred by, say, labelmates Black Flag's sped-up heavy metal, or Watt jam-buddies Sonic Youth's atonal drone-poems.

It's not a value judgment, just an observation to ask "what if the Minutemen were our Clash instead of, say, our Monks?" A band that could unfold politics into hopeful humanism; a band that walked it like they talked it; a band that never trusted where a wall was supposed to be unless they pushed against it. The Minutemen may have been uneven in their

experiments, but that's just the nature of the trick. Between the herky-jerky folk-funk tracks that didn't absorb so fast—the songs that made them a band's band, as it goes—they still hit some of the truest and best lines of their generation: Mr. Narrator, this *is* like Bob Dylan to me.

But Watt's humble about those days—maybe because to tell the story of the Minutemen only gets you partway to Mike Watt. The years when he put down the bass after tragedy or illness are folding happily back over him right now. Within a week of this interview, he'll finish a new album with the Secondmen (a bass-drums-organ trio with Pete Mazich and Jerry Trebotic), the first he's ever recorded in his hometown. After that, he'll meet Iggy and the Stooges in Japan—the only right and natural fill-in on bass those Michiganders could possibly pick. He's living 46-years-old like a



jazzman: moving up to play with the masters but still putting himself out there for any coming-up kid who wants to get in touch with him. He's not sinking into the scenery to run a label or reminisce (though he does have a book out, *Spies of a Minuteman*), but still playing, and still experimenting, and still learning.

So credit the man for honing his principles, for keeping a generous perspective—maybe it's a sailor-looking-at-the-horizon thing—and for recognizing the past for what it is: something to bounce off of. At 46, *all* his bands could be your life, if you want 'em to, and while Watt'd be the last guy to wanna play rock hero, there's still something here to be learned.

That's how the history lesson works, and where young Watt had E Bloom on the TV and R Hell through the mailorder, we now have Mike Watt. There's some inspiration there, like another guy from another California small town once said: "I guess what it all boils down to is: (a) You can't like people who don't like themselves and (b) You gotta like people who stand up for what they believe in, as long as what they believe in is (c) Righteous."

Interview by **Chris Ziegler**

Photos by **Andy Harris**

You once said something about growing up—about opening your eyes and you were in Navy housing. What was it like?

When I started going to school and meeting civilians, it was a real trip for me. I thought most people lived on bases. I met people who had folks that owned their own houses—I thought they were millionaires. I didn't know. Even here in San Pedro. Across the street from the graveyard where D Boon's buried is the Navy housing I first came to. Bukowski's buried there, too. And by some coincidence, Martin got buried next to D Boon, a couple places away—before the Minutemen, we had a band called the Reactionaries, and Martin was the singer. He died in December. Flesh-eating bacteria. Four days. Horrible.

What did you think of Pedro when you first came here?

First thing I noticed coming from Virginia was the weather. It was *way* calm: No sweaty summers, no freezing winters. Then all the different things: you had ocean, you had mountains, you had deserts, all these things you did not have in Virginia. Some things I see when we go through Virginia on tour, though: cardinals, fireflies, crabapples, honeysuckle. There's some things. Crickets—don't have to hear that much here. But I was too young to really know cultural differences yet, but I kind of had hints of it. In Virginia in school, we had to say the Lord's prayer. You didn't

have to do that here. They shouldn't have been doing it there, either—that's illegal! It's too personal of an issue—how can a government, a public trust, speak for everybody on a matter as personal as religion? That's why there's a Virginia guy named Jefferson, who said you have to keep them separate. You can say freedom of religion, you can say freedom *from* religion. People want shortcuts, but the truth of it is, the world's a tough place. You have to struggle; you have to hammer out some kind of contract between us all so we can live without tearing each other's heads off. The idea that you can eliminate some parts of the human family or get them to wear the same uniform to arrive at that end has been tried time after time through all the years, and never seems to work. But our memory is so short—we keep thinking, "Ah, we can give it another go."

So what's your prescription for a successful humane society?

Seems like all societies go through cycles of being real assholes and then real calm—all the civilizations, the tribes. If you look at Scandinavia, they've probably got some of the most civilized people right now, but they have a history of being some of the craziest-ass, violent people—Vikings, and all that. The US too: They go through phases, but

BOTTOM LINE: IS PUNK DEFINED BY THE MECHANICS OR THE STYLE—OR IS IT DEFINED BY THE *CONTENT*? MAYBE THAT'LL SALVAGE SOMETHING OUT OF IT, SO IT AIN'T THE SAME OLD SHOW.

they don't learn and pass things down. It's like, it seems only important when we learn them for ourselves, in *our* lifetimes.

There's no perspective.

Yeah, and sometimes it's way too late. Like today. The devices are so strong and the consequences so heavy, you can't really play around with that stuff. Nuclear, chemical, biological—these things are very different than swords. The earth can tolerate a lot of crazy shit in some ways, but we've gone pushing the bonds of the way physics and nature interact.

There's no room for error.

Or trial. If you're asking for a prescription, we've got to step back there a bit, be a little more humble with the power plays. And with the egos. Obviously, humans deal with egos, and there's no way of eliminating that, but put it more into an art field and less into these power games.

You're talking about using art to turn frustration into something constructive. Are there moments in your life that that's come out of?

D Boon was an artist. He was my first introduction to an artistic person. And within the punk scene, I got to meet other artists: Raymond Pettibon, and all those cats in that scene. It opened up my mind a lot; got me into reading about artists and the way they handled things. Obviously, it's not a panacea—Hitler was an artist; the swastika was a visual tool, a symbol. And every military unit always had a drummer boy. It depends on the intent of the wielder. Music's been used to buttress all kinds

of aggressive stuff. Just because it's music—just because it's art—doesn't mean it's going to be a calm thing. But in situations like I was in—small personal situations—we weren't dealing with big audiences, and we weren't trying to win people over with propaganda, or marketing, or sloganeering. It was in a small scene, so people felt comfortable expressing themselves in really personal ways. I think I benefited from that. I wasn't trying to take something out of it; I wasn't trying to sweep people off their feet, or get them to do something they didn't want to do. I didn't want to use anyone. I was in a fortunate position: I never had to feel ashamed of what I did. I think I was pretty responsible.

Those small numbers—is that something you think is built into punk?

Yeah. I came from an arena rock scene where I was very marginalized. I was not a participant at all—I was a piece of cattle being herded. And going from that scene to the punk scene and being part of something that was *happening*, it was like night and day. For people like me and D Boon, it empowered us. We weren't joining some kind of robot-army, we were trying to find our own voice. These cats were doing it, and it seemed like they were open-minded enough to give you a shot, so why not go for it? You'd never have felt that at all this stuff we had been going to at the Long Beach Arena or watching on television. This stuff was *inclusive*. It was like, "Hey, there's room here, come on! Sing and play!" If you're dealing with lots of numbers, if you want to move a lot of units to a lot of people, you're going to start tai-

loring your music to the lowest common denominator, or a target group. We didn't want to play that game. ¶ Bottom line: Is punk defined by the mechanics or the style—or is it defined by the *content*? Maybe that'll salvage something out of it, so it ain't the same old show. I once saw an ad in *Rolling Stone* that said, "The Man can't bust our music." And when I took a closer look, it was a CBS ad—the *Man* actually paid for that ad. They'll appropriate *anything*. They can ignore or oppose ideas for so long, and then they say, "You know what? We can make some real money selling those beads and those sandals." That's how it went down with the hippies. That's a scene that got co-opted. They diluted the ideas with merchandise; they tried to distill a social movement to a fashion statement, a passing fad. The same thing happened with the punk thing. But people have tried to keep it alive, to maintain that punk is a state of mind, a legitimate way to approach their art, music or whatever work it is that they do. It takes a lot of commitment to keep your hands in the mix. You have to be willing to buck trends, to be a wheel within a wheel. You have to be willing to live in a parallel universe.

Does that make it harder for bands that can't or won't play in that kind of business world to get out there to people?

No, not if they treat big business like it's the new kid in town. Keep in mind that they're always pushing last week's hits. They don't take risks. And most of the time it works because the thing about young people is that they're not confident in their taste, so they look to see what their friends



like. Liking something is mixed up with the need to fit in. When you're young there's a lot of peer pressure. Advertisers know this and they prey on it. Even when the slogan is "be an individual, be independent," no one wants to be the one person who likes a band that everyone else hates. It takes a kind of confidence to be that person, and confidence isn't common in teenagers. I came out around punk rock at a time when, aw man, hardly *anybody* liked it. In fact, everybody fucking *hated* me for liking it. There was D Boon, there was Martin and Georgie and a couple other guys and that's it in the whole town. Everybody else thought it sucked ass.

But that gave you a sort of freedom, too, right?

I'll tell you what it does: it builds a sense of self-reliance in you. If you just like something the moment you hear it and you have no doubts, you're going to seek out that thing, and you're not going to worry about approval. Then you're gonna start to realize that with something like music or zines, you have control over *them*, they don't have control over *you*. Social acceptance is fragile, especially when you're a teenager, so I think a kid's best bet is to jump feet first into the deep end, because the ones that don't go through that, there's no guarantee. The truth is maybe they're missing out. Not only are they missing out on finding music or art or whatever, but they're missing out on experiences that can build character. I like the idea that you can put out something honest and it will

speak for itself—that it will naturally connect with people.

You think that still exists?

I think it always will. There might be these other forces that kind of bury it, forces that take up so much attention in folks' minds that they never get to see that other thing, because it gets clouded with all the other things. Like ads, or if all you're listening to is KROQ, you're probably only going to hear the KROQ bands. You have to be a little adventurous. But how do you be adventurous? It's tough. Zines were very important in the old days, and I still think they are, but now we also have the Internet, and that's kind of like having a million zines at your fingertips 24 hours a day.

So it self-corrects. One thing balances another.

Absolutely. Punk puts out the question: Do you want to be *free*? Or do you want to have people tell you what to like? We need to keep asking ourselves that question because it's a living, dynamic thing. If we do the work to spice it up, it won't get all old and crusty. I talk to young people and some of them seem to think that everything in punk has been done, and it's all over. I don't believe that—I think there's a lot to do. The scene was so wide open and it still can be. There are a lot of people who are still taking chances and reinventing the sound, look, and feel of punk. I think there are scenes out there that reward that experimentation. Sometimes the commercials make it seem as if the whole world only wants the good-looking guys with the tat-

toos playing that one song everybody already knows, but it's not true. People have been writing love songs forever. It's easy to write an obvious, generic love song, but then think about that song "Love is a Four Letter Word" by Bob Dylan. There's always a way to mess around with tradition, and put your own original spin on it.

It sounds different to every ear.

That's what is neat about art. Tommy Aquinas worked it out for us a long time ago, when he said it's in the eye of the beholder. You can't really make generalizations. To do so is to lose the kind of humility I think we need to keep us from getting on each other over these issues that aren't worth dying over.

You said that people in your town gave you shit for being into punk. When did that change?

It was probably after the Minutemen. When people started to calm down a little. [laughs] A lot of people saw it as some sort of threat. I remember telling people, "We're going to write our own songs, play gigs, make our own records, instead of just copying songs." And they couldn't see that. They were like, "No, you're looking like a fag, you talk like a fag, sing like a fag . . ." All the sexual aspects made it seem like you weren't manly! I saw it in junior high school and high school with glam music. When Roxy Music came out—Bowie, Lou Reed—I couldn't tell people I was into that, except for a few girls, maybe. Girls in high school in the '70s were way more adventur-

SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IS FRAGILE, ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU'RE A TEENAGER, SO I THINK A KID'S BEST BET IS TO JUMP FEET FIRST INTO THE DEEP END, BECAUSE THE ONES THAT DON'T GO THROUGH THAT, THERE'S NO GUARANTEE.

ous than boys; they weren't as afraid. After a while, the guys figured it out: wait a minute, the *girls* like this? And eventually, you'd see jocks walking around with paint on their fingernails. Weird. But at first, they'd go out of their way to find you so they could say, "Fuck you, Devo!" Devo took major blows in those days—for some reason, that band got a lot of people really pissed off. There's really neat things about kids, but they're still human, and they get all tweaked out by their hormones. Just read *Lord of the Flies* to see how kids are. I mean, shit, they killed Piggy. That was so fucked. That's such a sad book. ¶ To get at any truth is going to take a lot of footwork. People always think there's a shortcut, some way to just bypass all the struggle and say, "Oh, there's the formula, there's the look, there's the sound. There are the right words, there's the right flag, there's the right way to march. There's a right way to hold your bass." But that isn't true. Of course, no man's an island, no woman's an island—we're all impressionable. We all succumb to influences of one sort or another. So you consider all those influences, but in the end you can make your own choices.

That's a good way to think of how you can be creative and independent—without being alienated.

Exactly. You don't want to lose sight of the individual. What if somebody says, "You know what? I can cure all your alienation if you just be conformist." You have to say, "You know what? The price of that ticket is too much for the ride." Because in the long

run, it's going to breed more alienation. If you're wearing a uniform, you're just freezing a problem without really attacking it or trying to solve it. It's a shortcut.

So is that the life you feel is left in punk?

I'm a 46-year-old punk rocker now, so this is *intense*. Where does a middle-aged man really sit in society? If you look at Squarejohns, he's supposed to be set up in his middle-class thing with a family, getting solidified in some kind of vocation or career—this is the way it's supposed to be. The reality is that a lot of cats at that age are having *huge* crises. They feel empty. They might have these material things, but they're bored stiff with the routine. All these things they followed by rote in order to be "happy" and "an important part of society," they feel lacking. So what do they do? Get the divorce, the teenage girlfriend, the convertible sports car. ¶ I know some guys, they want to be me: "I want to be on a boat, tour around the country!" I mean, I ain't Mike Jackson or anything, but there *is* a Peter Pan element, in a way. Not trying to say I stayed a kid all my life—in some ways, I had to be a lot more responsible. I don't have a boss telling me what to do. I know that seems like, "Oh, you're free of bosses," but you're also *aimless*. You have to motivate yourself. You have come up with the songs. You have to be *relevant*. ¶ What do you do when you're in a young man's game? Well, I would say, "How old is punk?" It's not such young music—maybe I'm just right for this movement. When the punk thing first started, there wasn't really a lot of teenagers; there was a lot of people

from glitter and glam, a lot of artist people. The kid thing kind of came from hardcore. I mean, thank god it did—I'm not defensive—but in a way, is it *really* a young man's music? Well, rock'n'roll is a young man's music—I can kind of see that. In the '50s, when it was invented, it was totally targeted at teenagers. But I think "the teenager" was invented then. Before that, people had to grow up really quick. But in the '50s, you had all this money the US made, the big war was over, and now you can take a few years off before you have to grow up.

You had disposable income then.

That's it! So now we got a market here of cats who were living at home, but they got some money.

So sell them the music.

Sell them the music. The music was going to come anyway, because of the situation we were in. We had this adversary we pictured as not such a free thing—the Soviet Union, the communists—yet we weren't letting a lot of our own people vote. We liked his music, but we weren't letting him vote. It was going to come, we were going to *have* to deal with this. To me, the '60s were a total logical consequence of the '50s. It wasn't some coup, some conspiracy, it was going to come. You can only spout words and slogans so long before some people—especially young people—start saying, "You know what? You're telling me this, but what does it *mean*?"

Has that spirit survived?

I still think it's healthy. I hear these people say that "these young people are slackers!" I



heard this 10 years ago too. Man, you've never seen slackers 'til you grew up when I did—laziest motherfuckers in the world! I think that when people are part of rebellious youth movements, it can be hard for them to get older; they get jealous of young people. I see this with the hippies that turned into yuppies: They're very afraid of young people—"Oh, they've all got guns, they're going to shoot you!" So what do they do? They put logos on all the young people's clothes so they don't create at all—we'll do it all for them and market it to them. They're jealous of losing their thing. But you know what? You *have* to let go. If you put yourself in the right position, you can still be significant. Because young people—if you don't come off all fuckin' conceited and know-it-all and not say that they got any input—they want you around. They don't want you running the show and keeping them down, but you've gone through shit that they know they're going to have to go through. You should know that you have to hand it over. These young cats are coming up in the world. But they hand over the radioactive dumps and give them *shit*, but don't give them the tools to deal with it—because you kept them as marketing cattle and sheep and you didn't promote their creativeness. You didn't hand down stuff. You didn't give some tips about what hurt you so they don't have to go through it.

It all leads back to perspective, again.

It does. I hate the separation. In jazz, I see Elvin Jones play and he's *always* got young guys in his band. It's like, "Well, I'm going to hand some stuff down." So me, being a middle-aged punk rocker, yeah, I'm differ-

ent. I look like their dad. Maybe it makes them think, "What will I be like when I'm 46? What will I do? Why is this guy still doing this?" When me and D Boon were playing as 22-year-olds, we were always trying to hit on, "Let's get these people to ask themselves questions." Well, in my present state, my middle-aged thing, I'm doing the same thing: Where are you? Where do you stand? And where am I standing? Are you just going to listen to me because I've been around? Is that really enough? No! I should have something to say *today*. I shouldn't be a legend. I mean, yeah, I didn't get killed, I didn't get the flesh-eating bacteria, I didn't get in the van wreck, but that's just dumb luck. There are a lot of cats that aren't here today that were trying their hardest. Unfortunately, shit happened. And just because it didn't happen to me so much, I could have just as easily missed the boat.

So what's the most important thing you've learned?

That I've got a long way to go and a lot more to learn! There's so much out there. But what punk really helped me to learn was to ask questions. It wasn't like, "Oh, I got a few answered, now I know everything." It was sort of like Coltrane, who'd always practice 12 to 14 hours a day. And I remember watching this thing and Rashied Ali said, "How could he practice so much? He was already so good!" But what I think is that when Coltrane got some lick or something down really good, that would open it up to other possibilities. He was *never* finished. And that is the same thing I've learned—I have learned some things, but they opened up all these other questions; opened up all kinds of regions

and arenas for me to explore. ¶ In some ways, I look back at myself as a young man and it's like, "Whoa, you're a little full of yourself. Get over yourself a little bit, there." But when you're younger and you have to find out who you are, you do have to get a little over-bold to get some nerve up. But the thing is to let go a little bit, too. I'm not saying become flaccid or part of the background scenery, but temper that attitude with a little humility. Consider that there might be another perspective—"I can learn from this cat, but maybe there's something he can learn from me, too." I've found it's interesting to keep that organic sense of things. Like what Perry [Farrell] told me: "Keep the child's eye." He didn't mean be naïve, he meant you should try to keep the ability to still find wonder so things can still trip you out a little bit, make you step back, and size up the whole deal again. It's not about pretending, being infantile, or some shit—you're still an adult woman or man. ¶ There are things you can hand to younger cats coming up and things they can show you—stuff you might have overlooked all these years. Like "Proud Mary." I knew that song my whole life and only a few years ago some kid pointed out to me it was about a steamboat! The "big wheel" is a paddle wheel! And here I was thinking it was the wheel of life! Here's something I knew frontwards and back, every Creedence line, every chord, and he just woke my shit *right* up. He didn't do it in a hurtful way and I was loose enough to think about it and say, "You know what? You're right. This guy is workin' on a steamboat!" ©

I CAME OUT AROUND PUNK ROCK AT A TIME WHEN, AW MAN, HARDLY ANYBODY LIKED IT. IN FACT EVERYBODY FLICKING HATED ME

Erase Errata are one of the great bands of our young and restless time because with their records, their vibrant live shows, and their jubilant aesthetic, they are one of the few that have galvanized the people, and shook some shit up. They have made us contend with what we are all so afraid of, which as I see it, is adventure and giving the consumer impulse a mouthful of dirty snow.

Erase Errata are so daring, fierce, and original that they make you realize that the last time "original" seemed like more than some fairy tale fantasy was a long time ago. Erase Errata are blessed with an originality that feels like it comes straight from some Biblical-style font-of-life. When Erase Errata get on stage, it's like they're saying "Get on the arc, and we will show you how to really cut loose, baby."

Erase Errata are freedom. They don't cop moves, they own them. After all, they covered the Who, making bold feminist strokes by covering the hallmark of cock strut in the annals of rock-n-macho-roll. In doing so with the most casual pluck, they show us all that it can be done. Twentieth century macho-dictate and *Frampton Comes Alive* need not apply.

Erase Errata are saving us and we didn't even know we needed to be saved. They are saving us from dudes pumping us all night with bad rhymes about being made from the best fur; from the fetid, tap water blues of the emo nation; from the aged and weary ex-member bandwagoneering; from the hardcore revivalists; and from those who don't know history well enough to not doom us with their repeated rehash. When you sigh "whatever" every time you see a picture of some crappy mainstreamo band on the cover of some magazine, that sigh is a prayer for Erase Errata.

How do they manage to sound so in control and yet so possessed, like the songs are being telegraphed to them. I turned to Sara Jaffe, Bianca Sparta, and Jenny Hoyston to find out.

Interview by **Jessica Hopper**

Photo by **Shane McCauley**

When you all met, did you know it was going to be something special? Like, when you met each other was it like a "hey you" special connection or more just like, "Aw yeah, I can jam with these chicks?"

Bianca: I don't know if we knew that it was going to be this, but I think we knew that we had a connection.

Sara: We definitely knew that we were going to be friends. Ellie and I would drive around Oakland listening to the California Lightning, Jenny's solo project.

Did you guys hang out a lot outside of the band or did your collective friendship grow out of being in a band together?

Sara: I think we hung out more outside of the band at first, and then we started doing the band a lot.

Bianca: When we started out we were just hanging out a lot as friends. Playing music was just the activity we did.

Did you fall in love with the music you were playing pretty immediately?

Sara: I don't know if I've ever really fallen in love with it. [laughs]. I mean, it's always been really fun and an interesting creative outlet, but I don't ever remember being like, "Oh my god, this song is amazing."

ERASE

WE'VE NEVER REALLY HAD ANY TYPE OF PLAN



ERRATA

I didn't mean it like that. I meant that feeling you get when you are like, "I feel so special to play this."

Bianca: I think the chemistry—the musical chemistry—was apparent right away.

Sara: Yeah, it did go pretty easily.

When you first started the band were you like, "here is the band I'm going to be serious about"?

Bianca: No, I don't think so.

Sara: No, I don't think any of us had any aspirations for the band at all.

Do you have aspirations now?

Bianca: We've never really set out any specific goals or aspirations. It's more like, "Oh, it would be fun to put out a single" or, "Oh it would be fun to go on a tour or go to Europe." We've never really had any type of plan or any specific goals for the band.

When did you first know that you really loved music?

Bianca: I was like three, or something.

Sara: I was very young too. I remember being very young and my dad teaching me songs on the piano that my grandfather had written.

What the first band you ever were in, and what

was it like? Not just the band name, but what was the intention? What did it sound like?

Bianca: I was in a terrible emo band. I don't even remember our name, but it was so bad. I would *love* to hear a tape of it.

When was this?

Bianca: It was when I first learned to play drums. It would have to be eight years ago or something. It was really bad.

How emo was it?

Bianca: Like *really* emo.

Like with the singer crawling on the ground, mic cord wrapped around himself?

Bianca: Maybe. It was before that was really popular. I remember quitting that band because it was so shitty and the guy was crying.

Sarah, what about your first band?

Sara: When I was in high school, I guess it was a band. I played music with my one other friend in high school who was into anything vaguely punk rock or indie or whatever. She just played drums and I played guitar. We had one original song and then we played PJ Harvey covers.

What was your one original song about?

Sara: It was called "Christina on the Hill," and it was about someone being in an earthquake in California. But it had some metaphorical levels as well. [laughs] Every year they would have this homeless benefit concert at my high school. It was kind of a talent show and we played twice.

Did you play "Christina on the Hill" both times?

Sara: No.

Bianca: Were there homeless people in Chico?

Sara: Yeah.

Bianca: Really?

Sara: Yeah, there's homeless people everywhere, dude.

What were you guys like in high school?

Sara: I was like a nerd, overachiever type who was still trying to be into cool things.

Bianca: I don't remember high school; it was a really terrible time for me.

As you get older, has your interaction with music changed? Do you find you are looking to music for new things?

Sara: I'm feeling lately—and this might partially be a result of burnout from all the touring we've done—that going to shows as

primarily a social activity is holding less and less interest for me. I still want to support my friends' bands and be part of a musical community, but I find increasingly that I'd rather be home listening to old folk records than going to see the band I've seen a million times merely because that's what's going on that night. ¶ I also feel fairly bummed out on the "post punk" explosion. I used to freak out if I heard a band with an Andy Gill riff—they were automatically my new favorite band—now that it's become more obvious and watered down, it doesn't set off that spark in me anymore.

Do you feel like being a non-pop band is a political action?

Sara: That's an interesting question. If you mean "pop" like trying to be popular and successful according to traditional channels, I guess to an extent it is. We're eschewing those channels and the frameworks that are laid out in order to do something different. But also I do think our band is "pop," and I think that calling the music we make pop is political, because it speaks to the fact that different things are catchy to different people.

How do you feel about making music—being an entertainer—in the face of what's going on in the world?

Bianca: I don't know if I can answer that question.

I don't want to make you uncomfortable.

Bianca: But I'm really uncomfortable. [laughs]

Well, then let me ask this: does the war make you feel any differently, or examine aspects of your band?

Jenny: Sure. It's frustrating having all this war-related blood on American hands—and we don't even know half of what's going

on in our name around the world. I am reluctant to travel lately. I can't help but soak up a lot of the negative "vibrations" in this world. I spit it back out at the universe when we perform. It feels good to yell.

Sara: I guess it made me feel like I wanted doing our band to be more than just getting up on stage and playing our songs—whether or not we were explicitly focusing on issues of the war. I've always been more likely to get involved in local politics, so I was more likely to talk about those kind of issues when playing shows in our hometown. It felt more important to talk about community, to try to build it with audiences and other artists.

When you go on tour to Europe and then come back home, what's the first thing you notice?

Sara: It's hard to have a clear view on that question, because whenever we've come back from a European trip, we're so exhausted and just *dying* to be back in California and in our own beds. But I think I notice American excess, the lack of efficiency, and more widespread political apathy more when I come back. The exigencies of political reality are a lot less part of daily life here, giving artists the privilege of saying they are doing their art "just for fun," as opposed to aligning themselves with political motives. Also, judging from how many people in Europe seem surprised that we are a relatively successful all-female band, I'd say we have the privilege of a relatively strong tradition of women musicians and supportive networks.

Do you identify yourselves as a feminist? Do you feel like your band is a feminist action?

Sara: Personally, I identify as a feminist, though I use that term in a way that I think is always complex and changing. Specific ideas about feminism or gender do not



necessarily get directly channeled into the band, but to the extent that I inhabit the world as a woman—as a *queer* woman, especially—playing in the band is one way I inhabit the world. I believe that all our various inhabitations have political significance. The band as a whole does not have any kind of political agenda or aspirations, but we all inevitably think about politics or gender in our personal ways and bring that to the band.

Bianca: But we never have had any major rumbles with the rock underground patriarchy.

What parts of the underground culture do you feel that Erase Errata challenges most?

Sara: I guess, mostly its tendency to replicate mainstream culture in pursuing success. We've had a lot of amazing opportunities to participate in activities that some might see as signs of success, and we have gratefully and happily accepted some of them, but we have never once thought about shaping our image, or our sound, to please anyone other than ourselves.

I'd heard that you had been talking about putting out your own records rather than being on another person's label. Why did you want to do that?

Sara: We were just going over our options of what to do and it just seemed like we were just so hands on anyway—even with Troubleman we do a ton of stuff ourselves. We just want to make sure we get things done the way we want them to be done, and it just seemed like why *not* cut out the middleman?

Bianca: It seemed like a fun project that we all wanted to do, but then the reality of it was that it was too much work for all of us to invest in while still trying to write and enjoy playing music. It was *way* too much.

Sara: Also we started thinking, "Well, we have a good relationship with Mike [Simonetti from Troubleman Unlimited records] and we like the records that he puts out." So we stayed with him.

You guys have turned down a lot of offers and tours that most bands would die for—why is that? Where does your resolve for a career on your own terms come from?

Jenny: That feels like an exaggeration, though it is true that we mostly think about the projects we want to do together and do them rather than wait for people to ask us to do things. When we do get offers for tours and such, we decide everything case by case. For the last few years I've lived on a shoestring—completely hand to mouth, but I'd rather live this way and be selective about the content and the placement of the music that we're doing. It has special meaning for me and I believe in its value.

Sara: I've never thought of music as my career, although it definitely has been the activity that has consumed most of my time in the last four years. None of us are very careerist in motive; we have always been about what feels good or right to us at a given time. It's always been really important to us to have the maximum amount of control over all aspects of the process, from the actual creative process, to booking shows, to putting out records—DIY just makes it more engaging, and fun. It just seems to make more sense. Having other people take care of things for you, or getting more involved in the music industry has always felt really alienating to me—it's more about money and celebrity cache and less about real people and making art.

For being people that eschew celebrity, you have a lot of high-profile fans. How does that feel when other bands or people you admire like your band? Does it surprise you?

Sara: It's flattering.

Bianca: Yeah, it's really flattering.

Sara: I'm really surprised that anybody knows about our band!

Bianca: It's really validating in a certain way. It feels really nice. Sometimes if I sit down and think about it, about all the people who I've admired musically that I've been able to come in contact with through the band, it's pretty mind-blowing. But on a regular basis, that's not what I'm feeling.

Do you feel like it's important to meet people who have been music heroes to you? Or do you think it's detrimental?

Sara: I'm mixed. I can't decide. I think it's both. I'm intimidated first but . . .

Bianca: . . . but they're just people too.

Sara: When we were on tour with the Ex in September, I got to the point when I could totally sit down and have a conversation with Andy. He is totally my guitar hero and I was able to sit and ask "When did you start playing guitar?" or, "How did you start doing this and that," like in a *peer* way. That pretty much blew my mind when I thought about it later.

Has that sort of stuff—or even just developing a fan base—been a validating experience, or is it an internal process?

Sara: All of the above

Bianca: Yeah, I really don't think of our band as something extreme, you know?

Is that because it's your life or because that's how you view music?

Bianca: Maybe a little bit of both. I mean, we've only done *two* records. I don't feel like we've earned enough to be like, "Oh wow, we've done this and done that." ©



CALLING THE MUSIC WE MAKE POP /S
POLITICAL, BECAUSE IT SPEAKS TO THE
FACT THAT DIFFERENT THINGS ARE
CATCHY TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

I JUST PROVIDE EVERYBODY WITH INFOTAINMENT

The main complaint I've had when reading interviews with Jello Biafra is that they're so packed with sound-bites and well-worn political riffs that they almost feel scripted. It almost makes you forget that there is a person behind the persona. In a way, it's easy to understand why.

Jello Biafra is one of punk's great icons. His early political disposition in the Dead Kennedys and his attitude towards DIY cultural production helped to shape the attitudes of countless punks that followed. As a result, it's easy to see how it would be hard to reach past the legacy. But inevitably, the traditional questions tend to ignore other aspects of Biafra's personality and work.

It's certainly not because those aspects of Biafra haven't been in full view all along: as this very issue of *Punk Planet* will attest, Biafra has signed and nurtured the careers of some of the most important DIY bands of the last generation—NoMeansNo and Neurosis among many others. And while his now-25-year-old independent label Alternative Tentacles has seen some of its more important groups depart in the last few years, Biafra keeps it an incredibly diverse label, reissuing terrific records like the first Comets on Fire LP last year—a truly intense recording—as well as solidifying the label's political base through a growing catalog of radical spoken word recordings. Whatever is sincerely oppositional has a home somewhere in Alternative Tentacles' catalog.

In fact, for a company and an artist like Biafra to have survived this long and remained so creative is nothing short of amazing. That he has continued to evolve and grow both as a label owner, performer, speaker, and person is equally amazing. That too often this evolution is overlooked is unfortunate. Perhaps he was just being asked the wrong questions.

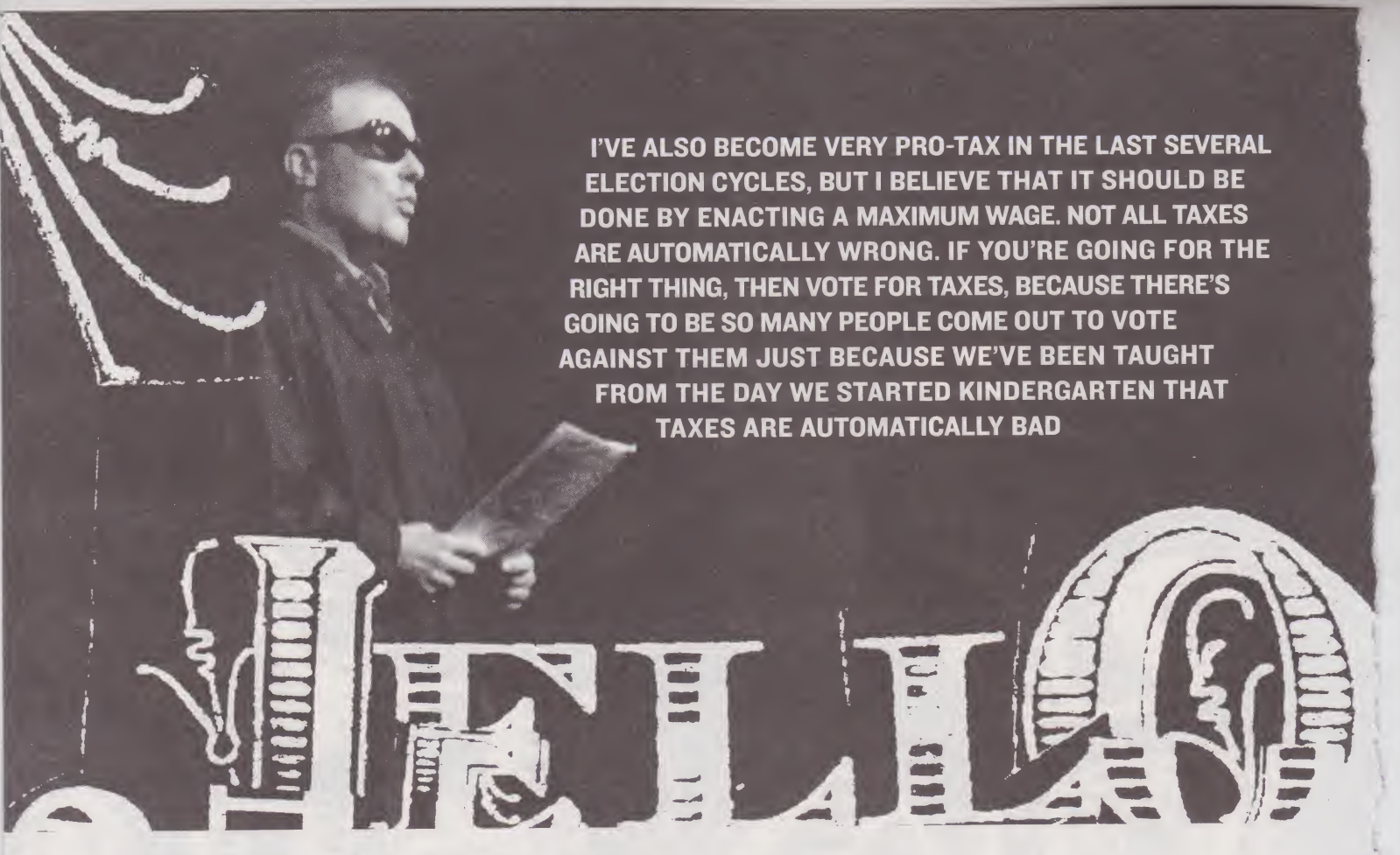
As I sat down to prepare to interview Biafra for his second big *Punk Planet* profile (his first was eight years ago), I was determined to have a different kind of conversation with him. One that—while I was certain would inevitably cover some familiar themes—would paint a more complete portrait of Biafra than I was used to seeing. Sitting down to write this introduction after transcribing our phone conversation—Biafra was down in LA finishing a collaboration with the Melvins—I feel like I got what I wanted.

Interview by **Joel Schalit** Photos by **Remo Camerota**



JELLO DIARRA





I'VE ALSO BECOME VERY PRO-TAX IN THE LAST SEVERAL ELECTION CYCLES, BUT I BELIEVE THAT IT SHOULD BE DONE BY ENACTING A MAXIMUM WAGE. NOT ALL TAXES ARE AUTOMATICALLY WRONG. IF YOU'RE GOING FOR THE RIGHT THING, THEN VOTE FOR TAXES, BECAUSE THERE'S GOING TO BE SO MANY PEOPLE COME OUT TO VOTE AGAINST THEM JUST BECAUSE WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT FROM THE DAY WE STARTED KINDERGARTEN THAT TAXES ARE AUTOMATICALLY BAD

What brings you to LA?

I'm recording a new album with the Melvins.

I heard you'd done some work with them last summer—it's still going on?

We have to do the other half now.

What's the record called?

Never Breathe What You Can't See.

Where does the title come from?

Well, the Melvins used to live in San Francisco but wound up relocating to LA as a result of the skyrocketing rental situation that has driven so many artists, musicians, and service workers out of San Francisco's city limits. So I've been going back and forth with them about LA versus San Francisco because I don't particularly want to live down here. I complained about the air, and Buzz said "never breathe what you can't see." I thought "OK, that's our album title." Who knows, we might come up with a better one.

What's the album sound like so far?

That'll be for you to decide. The weird thing is that I wrote rock songs with the Melvins in mind, and Buzz walked in with punkier riffs for me. Maybe it will sound like a combination of Lard and the album I did with DOA. There's also some songs on there that don't sound like anything either of us have done before.

Obviously I'm guessing it will have some political subject matter . . .

[laughs] For the most part, I sing the blues. I write what comes out of me, and that's generally what comes out of me.

Why do you think that is what comes out? Have you always been like that?

I've been a newshound since I was a little kid. I don't know anyone 45 years old who remembers the Berlin Wall going up or Kennedy getting shot. I do. I remember being in my parent's living room and seeing Lee Harvey Oswald getting shot on TV. I have very vivid memories of the police

violence of the '60s and the anti-war movement—which was huge at the University of Colorado in Boulder, where I grew up. I remember the birth of the environmental and civil rights, and feminist and choice movements too.

Would you call yourself a boomer then?

Demographically I'm at the tail end of that, but I don't think I listen to as much James Taylor as a lot of my high school graduating class. Ten years after I got the hell out of school—I was part of the bicentennial class, I graduated 83rd in my class—out came a notice about our 10-year reunion. It was going to be called "Still Crazy After All These Years," in tribute to the Paul Simon song. I thought, "Is there *anybody* I'd really want to see at this thing? No!" so I just filled out the form and listed my occupation as "cultural terrorist." They wanted a short statement of what I'd done the past 10 years, and I wrote very graphic descriptions of everyone I'd known who'd died of a drug overdose. They didn't print it! [laughs]

Tell me a bit about your upbringing. You seem like you must have been raised in a fairly liberal environment.

I would say my parents are borderline radicals for people their age. My dad was a psychiatric social worker; my mother was a librarian. I was always a newshound. More importantly, political issues were discussed with the kids in my family. Something really bad-ass would come on the news, like bloody, wounded soldiers in Vietnam or race riots, and we would discuss it. So at a very early age I learned things like why racism is wrong, why war is wrong, why pollution should be fought . . . I was always very engaged, and I'm incredibly grateful that I was too, because I have such graphic memories of a time that's fading more and more into a mythical past.

That's interesting, because I've always found the political opinions in your work as being something of a synthesis of post-war progressivism.

I'm glad I've never analyzed my stuff that way.

[laughs] It's hard not to hear. I think that understanding your background helps me to understand what I've always thought to be one of the most interesting things about your own work over the years: the curatorial work you've done as a label owner, and the kinds of things your label sells, which these days are not just music.

I like to go where the punk spirit is, as opposed to the commodified version of the sound. Of course we still put out punk music—the more extreme and weird the better, thus our relationships with The Phantom Limbs, Comets on Fire, The Fleshies, The Evaporators etc . . . I also think that the true spirit of punk rebellion and insurrection predates punk by centuries in many different forms. One person I go way back with artistically is Winston Smith, the collage artist who's done so many of my album covers. He doesn't look like a punk at all; he's had a big old beard on him ever since I met him in the early punk days, when people would ask, "What's this hippie doing here?" But he's got a hell of a lot more spirit than people who need beauticians to spike

their hair just right for MTV.

So I take it you don't like Good Charlotte?

I've never actually heard them.

They're the first band I've ever seen on MTV with liberty spikes.

You didn't see Rancid on MTV then?
[laughs]

I didn't have a television for a good part of the mid-'90s when Rancid was on MTV a lot.

I don't have cable for the main reason that I don't want anyone to watch MTV in my home. But hey, if it helps to get rid of George Bush I'd go on tour with Good Charlotte tomorrow.

Have you been asked to go on the Bands Against Bush tour this coming summer?

That subject was broached at the first meetings of Punkvoter.com. I agreed to be on the board and I agreed to be on as much of the tour as I can because I think it's a good project. Nobody is going to agree on everything, *especially* music. I was happy to team up with Michael Moore, Cornell West, and Eddie Vedder during the Nader campaign and the Democracy Rising, but it doesn't mean that we have to all be on the same page about everything. I can't imagine Ralph having a *single* good thing to say about my music or my lifestyle, but that doesn't mean we don't have our eyes on the same prize.

I'd be very curious for you to describe what your political disposition is—you do a lot of political speaking, but I've never heard you spell it out.

I go issue by issue. I learned decades ago not to stereotype myself as a Marxist or an Anarchist or a Libertarian or whatever, because none of those doctrines deals with every issue that confronts us in reality. [Late *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* publisher] Tim Yohannon pointed out to me that he was a socialist because we need a government to transfer the wealth from people who have too much and spread it around to the people who have too little. That completely flies in the face of Anarchist and Libertarian doctrine, but I'm down with that. I think that's important. ¶ I've also

become *very* pro-tax in the last several election cycles, but I believe that it should be done by enacting a maximum wage. Not all taxes are automatically wrong. If you're going for the right thing, then vote *for* taxes, because there's going to be so many people come out to vote *against* them just because we've been taught from the day we started kindergarten that taxes are automatically bad—"Hey, the American revolution happened because the British were taxing us. Remember the Boston Tea Party kids." People adhere to that belief even if it means cutting taxes so badly that the schools totally suck and then people get mad at the schools when your own kids graduate stupid and violent.

At 45, what do you think your relationship to youth culture is?

I'm just as much of a music fan as I was when I was a kid, in the same teenage childlike way, because I'm such an immature person.

[laughs] Do you still get a lot of young people coming to your spoken word events?

It's *mostly* young people, which kind of blows me away. I never would have thought that the Dead Kennedys' music—or that of our peers—would still be thought of as fresh and rebellious by so many young people today. In a weird way, now that punk has been so commodified, the fact that people are still interested in what I'm doing makes me very grateful. Instead of spending four hours a night explaining why I hate George Bush and corporate rule, I'd be spending four hours a night at the end of the bar raving into thin air about George Bush and corporate rule.

So do you think that people who come and listen to you speak these days come to hear you because you're a political commentator? Or is it because your punk legacy draws them to listen to your political commentaries?

I think it varies depending upon the person. Some people come to hear the political stuff. Some people go because they want to be entertained. So I just provide everybody with infotainment.

That "infotainment" line seems, in a lot of

ways, to be the unstated thesis behind Alternative Tentacles too. In recent years, the label has obviously undergone a lot of changes. You lost control of the Dead Kennedys' catalogue to your ex-bandmates . . . that must have been a blow. How do you see your label functioning these days?

It's a struggle to keep functioning at all. It's not just the heavy-handed thugs that have gone after me with lawsuits—which is still going on by the way. Their new move is to try and expel me from the Dead Kennedys ex-band partnership, now that the appellate court wants the issue of breaking up the partnership revisited. Their goal is to kick me out of the partnership completely so that they don't have to pay me anymore. Already I'm not allowed any say in what goes on. I'm not allowed to see all of the books. If I want a copy of the new versions of the records or the DVD, I have to go buy it at the store. I just hope that people realize that this is very much still going on and that even stuff you guys have printed from the press release about it in *Punk Planet* is largely bullshit. The best way to fight that is to think twice about supporting any of the attempts to dumb down Dead Kennedys into a mainstream corporate marketing scam. I feel like I'm married to the mob.

So I take it you're not on good terms with any former members of the band at this point?

They've made it abundantly clear that they don't want anything like that. They'll put out phony press releases saying "Now that we've sued you half to death, practically destroyed your life, and bankrupted you and your label, why don't you bury the hatchet and come sing with us at retro shows." They floated that one just to get people to assume I was going back into the band and show up at their ill-fated 25th anniversary show in LA. It seems like months after that, people are having a delayed case of falling for the hype and assuming now that everything is cool and I'm jumping for joy that they've sued me for six years and our releases have now come out on Manifesto and Cleopatra. ¶ Take a look at their website and they even come out and say it's all about cash. "Sales up 33 percent!" That's not what Dead Kennedys is for. What

I resent are all these repeated attempts to bully me into knuckling under to that. I don't want to become them; I don't want anything to do with that. I'm proud as hell of the music we did and the legacy we left.

How has the fallout from the lawsuit affected your life?

I've been working my ass off to earn money to pay my own bills so I don't have to drain money from the label to do it.

So on the one hand you're touring like crazy, doing a lot more spoken word events than you used to . . .

I've always done condensed tours, but it has been more constant in recent years. But part of that has been because of the new uprising against corporate dictatorships since Seattle, there's more demand. That puts me in the uncomfortable position of being taken as a leader, which has never been my aim as an artist. Sure, I've got very explicit opinions, but I don't like being in the position of guru or somebody people should obey. I continue to try and walk the tightrope of trying to inspire without being someone people depend on to do their thinking and acting for them.

With everything that's happened, both personally with the lawsuit, culturally with the massive integration of punk into mainstream corporate entertainment culture, and politically in this country, how has the way you think about your work—especially with the label—changed?

It means staying true to the original spirit of Alternative Tentacles, which was to provide an outlet for people wanting to work completely outside of the mainstream entertainment industry. When we started doing other bands, that reason drew everyone from DOA to TSOL to the Butthole Surfers to the Dicks to the label. Now, we operate further outside the mainstream entertainment industry because we never had much interest in hitching our wagon to Punk Incorporated. We didn't put out that kind of stuff. We have put out some more melodic punk music in recent years, like Pansy Division and The Evaporators, but in each of those cases, there's a lot of extras involved in those bands aside from the

sound of the music. They have a very particular vision. ¶ Another part of surviving has been battening down the hatches more and more as less and less money comes in. It's like banging our heads against the wall to get rid of 1,000 or 3,000 copies of everything. But that isn't just happening to us, it's happening to labels everywhere. It makes you have to decide whether you want to keep being a label or do you want to throw in the towel or pull the plug at an even hundred, like John Yates did with Allied a few years ago because he didn't want to be a music industry guy. I'm a little more wet to it because I'm a music artist myself and Alternative Tentacles is a beast that operates on its own with or without me—people who support the label would refuse to let it die even if I wanted it to. I have to be respectful and responsive to that. ¶ Besides, where would I go? There's not too many other labels out there I'd feel comfortable being owned by. This way, anything that goes wrong is my own fault. That helped defang my rock-star side very early on. There was no one else left to yell at if the artwork didn't turn out exactly like I wanted it to look in my head. If I did, I'd be taking it out on somebody who's working for me who is also an artist in their own right and is a good friend. You can't like act like that. ¶ I learned many years ago to be forthright and honest with artists and bands—to say *this* is what we can do and *this* is what we can't do, take it or leave it. I really wanted to do Gwar early on when they were label hunting, but I thought it was really important to not promise them the moon. I told them, "This is what we can do." Eventually they decided to go to Metal Blade instead.

Speaking to you as a label person and as an artist who owns a small business, in today's economic climate—as negative as it is for independent labels—what should a label be doing right now to keep its head above water?

If you took a poll of any independent label that goes through Mordam or Revolver, you'll get a different answer from every one of them. And if you asked people who worked at AT, you'd get different answers too. At AT, I'm the absentee thought-lord. I'm not in the office every day. These are

questions debated more by the staff than they are by me. So the best I can say is to continue soul searching, and ask, "Why am I doing this? Why am I banging my head against the wall?" If the reasons don't justify continuing to be a label, then don't. ¶ Part of what's happened is that starting with Nirvanamania, and the Green Day boom later, more and more people started all of these cool bands and all of these cool labels, but the audience never grew. By the same percentage, the slices of the pie keep on getting smaller and smaller. Plus now Bush is President, the economy has tanked and nobody has any money anymore. Rents aren't just going through the ceiling in San Francisco, it's happening *everywhere*. That cuts straight into the disposable income that people spend on CDs and 7"s and going out to see unknown bands. It must have been four or five years ago when Dave from Estrus Records told me "Watch it, the economy is tanking out there." People who used to buy 20 or 30 7"s a month are only buying two now.

But hasn't the mailorder end of AT—driven by the website—become a considerable source of income for you in a declining record market?

It's helped keep us alive. Everybody who supports us is doing far more to support Alternative Tentacles and the underground in general than they know. But it's not the whole answer. Meanwhile,

Mordam is having more and more trouble getting stuff stocked in stores. Because so much stuff is out there, and labels are hurting because of file sharing and mail order, while the buyer at an independent store is trying to keep their store in business amidst the onslaught of Blockbuster and Virgin Megastores, and they get flooded with one to 500 new indie releases by unknown bands every month. What do they do? They haven't heard any of them. It's becoming more and more of a battle to kick your releases under the door after they lock up at night and get them in the bins. The stores themselves are really hurting. It has really had a terrible effect on me as the terminal vinyl junkie and fan because so much of the cool shit I used to find used is getting hidden behind the counter so it can be sold on Ebay. Why? Because there is no other way for the store to survive! I've even had albums pulled out of my hand at the cash register and been told, "Oh, hey, we don't know what it is, but now that we see you want it, we better look up its value so we can sell it on Ebay." ¶ Let's face it: There are less and less reasons for artists to go to labels. Although I think more of them are realizing after a while that they don't want to do the legwork to keep themselves functioning as one-artist independent labels. There's a new batch of people coming to labels like us wanting to get out of that kind of situation. I guess we're becoming more of a

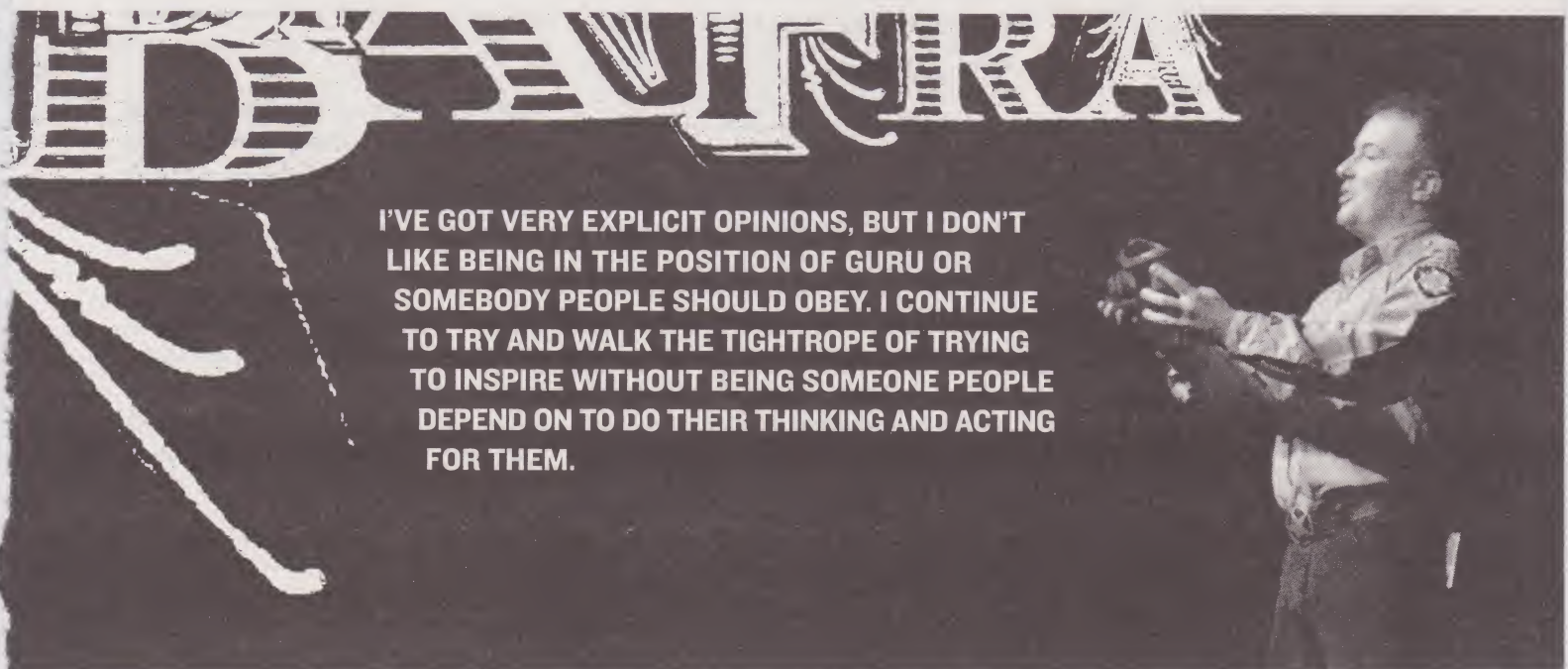
service agency in a way.

[laughs] So do you think that indie labels are becoming more like art galleries?

No, I don't think that's true.

Do you think the situation will improve for independent labels then? Or will it remain the same as long as the political and economic situation remains so dire, where forces continue to inhibit labels like yours from servicing the needs that they've historically met?

I can't really say. I don't know what the future holds. Even Ruth Schwartz at Mordam was saying a few years ago that everything was going to turn into digital downloading and MP3s. Clearly it hasn't. But has it become a more important force? Yes. Alternative Tentacles and Mordam have moved with that force, but I never bought into it because I remember when MTV first came out that people were saying now that there's not going to be any point writing a song unless you've got a video clip to go with it. And I knew that was bullshit. But I don't know what's going to happen. Alternative Tentacles needs to exist because I want an outlet for my work. It means too much to me after over 300 releases just to throw the whole thing away. At the same time, I don't know how exciting Alternative Tentacles will become for me if all we're doing is acting as an online promotions agency. But I think we're many years away from having to face that question in that direct a way. ©



I'VE GOT VERY EXPLICIT OPINIONS, BUT I DON'T LIKE BEING IN THE POSITION OF GURU OR SOMEBODY PEOPLE SHOULD OBEY. I CONTINUE TO TRY AND WALK THE TIGHTROPE OF TRYING TO INSPIRE WITHOUT BEING SOMEONE PEOPLE DEPEND ON TO DO THEIR THINKING AND ACTING FOR THEM.

Olympia, Washington performance artist Miranda July once wrote, "Everyone in the Northwest knows there wouldn't have been Riot Girl without Stella Marrs."

Stella is an inspiration to many—not just to those living in the Pacific Northwest. Her use of the word "girl," as well as her work as an alternative business person and a performance artist helped give birth to a brand new kind of feminism. The former proprietor of legendary Olympia boutique Girl City and impresario behind several iconographic public art events during the 1980s—*50 Girls/50 States*, and *Science for Girls*—Stella laid the cultural groundwork for the revolutionary explosion of feminist punk creativity that swept Olympia—and later the world—in the 1990s.

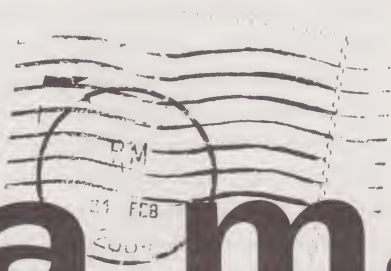
In addition to her large-scale work, Stella Marrs has been making a living from creating sharp, witty, sad, and informed postcards for two decades now. Some of her postcards deal with the power dynamics between the sexes and society's expectations between men and women; some grapple with environmental issues head on; and some have pictures of cute cats. Most of Stella's postcards feel subversive because they communicate socio-political messages framed by familiar graphics, often drawing from 1950s icons of self-satisfaction and happiness centred around suspiciously blissful domestic myths like the nuclear family.

Why did I want to interview Stella and not a more obvious musical figure for *Punk Planet's* 10th Anniversary issue? Because Olympia—above any place in America—is dear and special to me. It contains many friends and values that I cherish. An innocence, sure, but also a series of solutions at how to circumnavigate the demands that mainstream society—and even harsher, American corporations—place upon us.

Olympia's got a lovely river, and houses that are far more affordable than where I live in Brighton, England. It has a hill, and a tiny downtown area, and that cool old Capital Theatre building. It's home to the Kill Rock Stars, YoYo studios, and Stella's husband Al Larsen, Nikki McClure, and Tobi Vail, and the Dub Narcotic studios and Calvin Johnson, and oh so many things that make me happy to be alive. And there's that weird apartment building where everyone used to live that smelled so strongly of fennel or Tandoori or cinnamon.

The only bake sale I've been to was in Olympia. I've drunk from fountains in Olympia. I've had big snowball fights and made snow angels in Olympia. And central to all this—I know because my friends tell me so, and because I've met the lady and seen her art and experienced her influence first hand—is Stella Marrs. Why do I want to interview her? Because she personifies Olympia to me.

Interview by **Everett True** Illustration by **Foundation Visual Structures** Images by **Stella Marrs with Sean Tejaratchi**



stella marrs

What do you think it is about Olympia that has allowed it to become the kind of utopian space it now is? Sure, it's a college town, but it is *totally* distinct from other university towns like Berkeley, Madison, or Ann Arbor.

Utopia? I don't think so. Small, yes. A higher incidence of eating dinner together and laying down the framework for ideas and plans? Maybe. ¶ For two years these amazing artist girls did something they called "The Red Horse Café." Every Sunday night you could go there, buy a beautiful vegetarian dinner, sit at tables with people you might not know, and have a good time. You'd end up leaving with new friends, or plans, or projects. It is a very powerful social act to bring people "to the table."

Do you think that is uniquely Olympia? Are there other institutions like that?

I'd like to talk about the Olympia food co-op. I have a one-page design for the co-op that could be a whole page poster. It is the mission statement of the co-op. I truly respect it. ¶ Marketing the cards to stores for so long, I've noticed how the chains have bought out the little independent health food stores. I appreciate The Olympia Food Co-op and its "not for profit, food for people" mission statement. Staying true to the original vision means that it doesn't sell wine or sugar. This year, UPC scanners were installed there and about 100 people showed up at the board meeting to passionately debate this purchase. The mission statement seems like a working

business philosophy that results in a healthy work environment serving the community and paying its staff a living wage. I've been wanting to make a poster for co-op shoppers to take home and put on their fridge about the mission statement.

What's the attraction of Olympia? Does it hold more attraction for you than other places? Do you feel it enables you to follow your own path more than living in Seattle, or LA, or Dublin would, say? You once created a project called Girl City . . .

In 1980, Olympia was still undeveloped enough to be able to live cheaply and afford enough space to live and work in without trading all your time for that. Did "Girl City" really happen? Did I really stand on



girl

"I seem to remember something
about a Bill of Rights..."

Who's going



FEMINISM
NOW

militant
protection

of human LIFE



the sidewalk with my broke and bored girlfriends and say, "Hey Judy! Let's rent this storefront and spray paint "Girl City" on the window in pink! It'll be our clubhouse for making events and developing product lines. It will be our space to have fun and make something"? This was in a still-hippie culture that viewed this act as unfeministic treason. And just like making stone soup, we had a carwash and took that money and gave it to the landlord as rent for the weekend. Renting the spot for the weekend, we used it to have a garage/bake sale and made the money for the first month's rent. ¶ I had this one very basic idea about the whole project—that if girls could just make things and see themselves reflected in what they made, and then trade it for money, that it could be a window to empowerment about alternatives for economic survival. Because if you get to live outside the normal system you might just have a chance for a different vision, which could ultimately mean an alternative voice. I remember very specifically looking out of my apartment window across the street at the Girl City storefront the morning of the fundraiser. This boy showed up with muffins he had baked for the sale. Witnessing this gesture of kindness inspired so much love and hope in me. I was part of the fabric of this place and these people trying to make something in our small-town world.

Why would those actions be viewed as unfeministic treason? I thought the whole point of hippie culture was to step outside the mainstream and create alternatives for oneself?

Well, this is when the hippies were the Olympia mainstream, but still thought of themselves as alternative, and really hated spray paint and glitter because that implied punk, which implied vandalism to our more conservative landlord males.

Do you feel sometimes that the project—literally a girl city—has come to fruition where you live?

Well, I love that Ladyfest initially happened in Olympia, and that there was a consciousness about documenting all of the meetings developing it and posting them on the web to serve as a blueprint for other Ladyfests. The whole trajectory of envisioning, organizing, and working through

the bazillion problems that come up, and concluding a project can only test character and assumptions about community.

The term "ladyfest" seems like a logical conclusion from your continuous repetition of the word "girl" in your '80s projects like Girl City, 50 Girls/ 50 States, and Science for Girls. What was your theory behind using "girl"?

The "girl" work is from a deep place that tries to counter this culture's shackles on girls. It is a reaction to the ridiculous taboos on girls being too silly and friendly with each other, having too much fun, or having a strong viewpoint and sense of self-worth and being able to articulate it. "Girl" work tries to lay down girl action as the status quo. ¶ For example, take *Science for Girls*: *Science for Girls* was a piece of writing I wrote in response to my biological drive to create a successful family. It allowed me to research and think through how you could run a kissing experiment with boys while retaining emotional objectivity as a girl scientist. The end goal was to match the test results with your specific objectives for a best mating partner. I was driven to make a family for myself, but was desperately trying to be smart about it.

What did you learn from these events? I'd wager a lot.

I like how when you go into a project with a room full of people with one goal, that six degrees of separation concept can come into play. Like you'd ask "How can we get X?" And it would always turn out that either someone has an uncle owning X, or knows that the uncle might know someone with X. It was amazing the resources that seemed to rain on us by just asking. ¶ *50 Girls/50 States* and my other project you didn't mention, *Women for World Peace*, started to teach me what I didn't know about making large-scale community projects. I didn't know how to pace myself, so I wouldn't completely burn out. I realized I really didn't know how to properly take care of my physical body. But I was hyperaware of every action and interface in this process as art. I discovered how much inevitable conflict was involved in trying to do anything in this world. ¶ The idea of world peace became impossible in my mind as any achievable reality. As a debutante for world peace [in

50 Girls/50 States] I had to continually check my responses and thoughts about the situation I was in. How to reframe my response peacefully and still meet my objective was the inherent struggle to complete the project. Personally I realized that world peace could only be a series of simple, thoughtful, and kind gestures.

You've gone from such large-scale projects to the intimate medium of postcards. How did you end up working with postcards?

After college, I made hundreds of different paintings, products, and events. I never put my name on anything during that period. I preferred to think of it all as some sort of warm-up exercise for what I was really going to do. I finally settled on using my name on the back of postcards because I realized I better accept this medium by the default since I could afford to start manufacturing it. Plus it seemed to have a lot of promise: it was endlessly a challenge to come up with a new design for each image; it could be educational; and I could travel and sell it on public transportation because it was small and I didn't have a car.

Is it possible to make a living from postcards?

I wonder how to answer that. Is it possible to make a living selling bubblegum? I am 20 years into this. When I think back at how it took every possible late night, bit of luck, never accepting no for an answer, and the efforts of many brilliant people contributing, I realize that all that work—that type of perseverance—could have been applied to anything and probably have succeeded. But do you really want to work that hard to make a living selling bubblegum? In a way, the rest of the postcards exist just so the environmental cards can. They are my desperate attempts to say, "Do you know about this? How about this?" ¶ Here is the other critical "lucky" piece of being in business: I have had the amazing good fortune of working with Sean Tejaratchi who is a graphic punk genius. Much of what has been printed by Stella Marrs is the gift of his moral designs, and unfailing humor that is either completely off the wall or inspired social criticism.

What is your motivation? Why do you do what you do?

I went through basic training in the US military at age 17 for six weeks and then was honourably discharged. I was there for the same reason that 99 percent of the women in my platoon were: we had nowhere to go, no other economic or personal options for survival. Basic training is a brutally destructive force to human will and cultivating any sense of personal responsibility to an individual vision. Which is the whole point of basic: to erase your sense of self in order to make you a part of the killing machine; to make sure that all soldiers will first and foremost blindly follow their chain of command. ¶ Witnessing the efficiency and scale of this organization set up a reaction in me where I realized that *any* act of construction was in itself of *huge* value. This was a very forgiving view for me to have about myself and art making. It freed me from the destructive self-judgment that happens when you start something and it isn't "great" yet.

How flexible is your path?

I'd like to think there is still some flexibility—there must be since process is really what excites me. Right now I am looking at the past with this perspective of what happened in a 20-year unit of time. I realize how lucky I was with the ability to focus on certain goals in one place and achieve them. So I am thinking about that time unit and trying to imagine what the next one could accomplish.

What are some of your favorite pieces of art?

Here is one: I love to think of Joseph Bueys coming to New York in 1974 and living at the Rene Blode Gallery with a coyote for a week. It was a piece called, "I like America and America likes me." He had his staff and was wrapped in a wool blanket coexisting with the coyote in the gallery for a week. Just imagine—the coyote is checking you

out; you are breathing; the coyote is breathing . . . Who goes to sleep first? Who wakes up? What happens to each through all that time? How do you understand yourself and the other? Bueys viewed the work as "an attempt to understand the complexities of interdependence between nature and culture, and as a step toward ecological sustainability".

Who are some of your inspirations?

Obviously Eleanor Roosevelt and Malcolm X are great inspirations. German artist Joseph Bueys has been a touchstone for a long time, planting 7,000 oak trees as an art act; being fired from the art university he taught at and starting a free school in the parking lot across the street. Buckminster Fuller is someone we all need to remember about as we rut ever deeper into concrete; his thought processes were so envisioning of the future that in a 1965 *New Yorker* there is an interview with him where he is describing the Internet and how it will transform society. ¶ But I need an alive an active heroine for *now*! Luckily there is someone named Suzanne Lacy—an artist with a body of work about feminism, community, communication, and perception alteration. I read the most amazing essay she wrote about the goals of Buddhism and how those ideas are present currently in art activism. The essay is called "Not fast enough, looking at engagement."

How about some of your work? What are your recent projects?

I have this slide show/lecture I put together to deconstruct how we think of our omnitoxic world around us and all the poison present in trying to function normally—Through old seductive advertisements, I show how we were sold "safe" products that had never been tested—the purchasing pub-

lic were the guinea pigs. We are now witnessing the fallout with allergies, a cancer culture, serious fertility problems, and an unexplainable autism explosion. I'm talking about mainstream dish detergent and bathroom deodorizer here. I also describe the non-existent regulatory system and how it doesn't protect human health. ¶ Here is a simple idea that we can't develop and implement fast enough in this country: the Precautionary Principle, which switches the burden of proof to the manufacture about safety issues. I would love to give this talk many, many times in the next year.

You choose to use cats as a symbol of opposition and resistance – I'm thinking of slogans like "The average American is exposed to 3,000 advertising messages a day—resist"; "Privacy – it's your right"—what is it about the feline form that inspires you that way?

I don't choose cats because I like them so much—although I do love my cat, she's a really, really good cat. Cats star in the post-cards because generally their sales numbers do better than other cards. Making sure I print a few "hits" every time let's me pay for the cards that have narrower markets.

So cats are more subversive than other cultural signifiers?

Cats are cute, dude. ☺

If you get to live outside the normal system you might just have a chance for a different vision, which could ultimately mean an alternative voice.



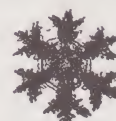
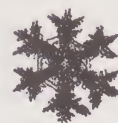
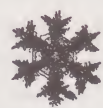
OLYMPIA FOOD COOP MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Cooperative is to contribute to the health and well-being of people by providing wholesome foods and other goods and services, accessible to all, through a locally-oriented, collectively managed, not-for-profit cooperative organization that relies on consensus decision making. We strive to make human effects on the earth and its inhabitants positive and renewing and to encourage economic and social justice. Our goals are to:

- Provide information about food;
- Make good food accessible to more people
- Support efforts to increase democratic process;
- Support efforts to foster a socially and economically egalitarian society;
- Provide information about collective process and consensus decision making;
- Support local production;
- See to the long-term health of the business;
- Assist in the development of local community resources.



HATS OFF!
TO 25 YEARS OF FOOD FOR PEOPLE
NOT PROFIT!



NoMea

It's very rare that you experience a sense of relief when you hear that one of your favorite bands is issuing a best of compilation. They tend to signify the end of an artist's career—or, even more sadly, that their imagination is so stagnant or their pocketbooks so empty that they've decided to issue a collection of old recordings to keep their revenue stream flowing. But on rare occasions, this isn't the case. There are some excellent greatest hits packages out there, and there are artists who genuinely need to issue them to remind us of the vitality of their work—like the influential 25-year-old punk band from Victoria, British Columbia, NoMeansNo.

After ending 14 years of a warm working



relationship with Alternative Tentacles—a label whose identity was in many ways indistinguishable from that of NoMeansNo, and vice versa—most of the band's catalogue disappeared from North American record store shelves. Dissatisfied with AT's distributor, Mordam Records, NoMeansNo decided to pull their catalogue from Alternative Tentacles and pursue other distribution avenues. This spring, in tandem with a manufacturing and distribution deal with London's Southern Records, NMN began reissuing their catalogue in Europe, starting off with *The People's Choice*—an anthology spanning their entire career which was licensed for North America by the new Ipecac imprint, Ant Acid Audio.

Listening to *The People's Choice* the first

few times is like getting together with an old friend with whom you've shared the deepest of intimacies. Each track had that peculiarly narcissistic quality of reminding me of moments in my life that NoMeansNo had unwittingly provided the soundtrack for. Warm, epic, humorous, and frequently profound, *The People's Choice* reminded me of why this band influenced my own life—along with the lives of many of punk's tastemakers—when we were younger. Like the reasons that anyone latches onto a band, my passion for NoMeansNo was irrational, sentimental, and full of trust. But it was *real*.

That realness is proof of the incredible staying power of NoMeansNo's work. It's akin to the kind of transcendence of the best kinds

of art: music that rises above its immediate historical placement in our lives by speaking to us about truths that are hard to rationalize, but always imbue the present moment with a certain kind of hope, joy, and sense of community.

After speaking with NoMeansNo keyboardist/ bassist John Wright, it's clear that this experience of music is something that he seeks out in his own work too. Walking away from our conversation, I couldn't help but feel that, like a good NoMeansNo song, Wright confirmed that sometimes what an artist intends to communicate really does come across. In NoMeansNo's case, it comes across quite forcefully.

Interview by Joel Schalit

So you're off Alternative Tentacles and you've got a new label, Ant Acid Audio. What happened?

Yeah, we've been in the process of leaving AT for the last two years—amicably, for the most part, though Jello [Biafra] was sad to see us go. We wanted to start doing this for ourselves. We started by setting up a relationship with Southern Records in London. Our last record we did ourselves under the auspices of Wrong Records over there. Now we are in the process of re-releasing the back catalogue in Europe. We had fourteen years with AT, and it was certainly a great relationship. Afterwards, we found that we were casting ourselves adrift and concentrating on Europe, but we found ourselves in touch with Greg Werkman at Ipecac . . .

He's the former label manager at Alternative Tentacles, right?

Yeah. We really wanted to work with him again. He's a great guy and a good friend. He was interested in starting a sister label called Ant Acid Audio, so he could do something other than Mike Patton's stuff on Ipecac. Ant Acid Audio would be his own thing, but it will all be under the same umbrella. So we said "Why don't you release this compilation we're putting out in Europe?" He was like "Yeah, that would be great." ¶ Unfortunately, we were going to be playing shows down your way in May but the US government has made it even more difficult to get work permits. Nobody really knows what the rules are, so it has made it very difficult to play in the 'States.

Why would a Canadian musician find it difficult to enter the US?

Because they keep changing the rules and making it more and more of a hassle. That's the political environment in the US right now. It's been more and more difficult over the years though—it's not just because of September 11. You used to be able to get permits in 48 hours, then it was

30 days, then 90 days. Now it's 120 days.

Whatever happened to NAFTA? Wasn't that supposed to cover free trade?

NAFTA doesn't cover work permits. Even the P2 is not a regular work visa, it's something different. I can't really give you a good explanation though, because I really don't know myself. The long and the short of it is that we won't be coming to play any shows in May like we'd planned. Hopefully we'll get it sorted out and come down in the Fall. In the meantime we've got three tours of Europe to do in support of the release of the compilation as well as the re-releases of *Wrong* and *Mama*.

Is Ant Acid going to bring those out in the US?

No, we haven't talked to Greg about doing any of our back catalogue. He's just going to focus on getting out the compilation and reintroducing the band to stores and distributors. We've still got lots of interest from concert promoters too. The Hanson Brothers [NoMeansNo's side project] do quite well on tour and people have been asking us when NoMeansNo are coming back. There's definitely still a few hardcore fans down there.

You guys have been around for nearly 25 years now. What would you say is different for you working as a band now versus when you first started?

Personally, being around that long, having developed a reputation and having developed a really hardcore following, it's very easy to book tours and shows—much easier than a band first starting out. Also, we enjoy a little bit of freedom as to when we want to tour and where. In the last six to eight years, we haven't been touring as much as we did in the '80s though. I have a family—two boys—so I don't want to stay away for too long. That's where things have changed: having to balance a home life with a road life. But in that respect, we've been very lucky because we're able to tour, make money, and live from our music. We still

pack ourselves in the van, keep things pretty simple, and go out and play. It's just three guys banging it out.


Do you still consider yourselves a punk band?

I guess so. We've never been much for labels in that respect. We've always played in the punk milieu, but it's so obscure and co-opted now. All the lines are so blurred. We are a punk rock band in the sense that we haven't changed. We're still writing and performing music and not being too concerned with all the trappings that go along with the music industry. We're trying to keep things under as much of our own control as possible and be our own critics. We're trying to please ourselves first. It's just people getting and sharing a moment, and as a band it's your job to create that moment to convey something and hopefully to make an impression on people. Music is fun and it *should* be fun. We try to maintain that fun. We've all resolved that this is what we do best, that it has been a success, so why quit?

Over the years, you've experimented wildly with your sound. How would you characterize the eclecticism that your work has brought to the community?

We've always just been a band that writes songs. In some respects it's much more difficult to write when you have severe restrictions placed on what you can get away with. In NoMeansNo, we've always had an open approach. Because it started out with just bass and drums, the rhythm section had to work a lot harder—there were no guitar riffs to hide behind. Our lyrics subsequently took on a lot more prominent role, and the songwriting revolved more around the lyrical and emotional content. So right from the get go, we had a very different approach to writing music. We've also always had a





wide variety of influences and inspiration: from '50s and '60s jazz and swing to the punk rock of the late '70s and early '80s. That era of punk gave us the impetus to be a band. From that, we had the burst of energy that's always characterized our music. The attitude was "do what you want to do, and try and be yourself." Because of that, the songwriting has always been kinda strange.

How so?

For instance, writing songs for guitars on keyboards—I play keyboards, and translate the guitars—you'll find songs where you'll hear guitars doing things that a guitar player will never even think of doing because it wouldn't come naturally. The fact that all three of us—including Andy, our former guitar player—all wrote songs and spread out this responsibility. So the band wasn't confined to one writer, whereas most bands only have one or two writers. My brother Rob [NoMeansNo's drummer] writes the majority of the lyrics though, and he's a gifted lyricist. So the songs always have had great emotional content and something worthwhile to say. That is something that's really lacking now. There are not a lot of bands singing about anything particularly interesting.

Would you say that NoMeansNo has a particular kind of political disposition?

Not overtly. We're all political creatures to some degree, but we never wanted the band to be pigeonholed politically. We always hoped that the songs would transcend that a little bit and touch on our humanity at the core rather than our political attitudes, which sometimes doesn't cut very deeply at all. We obviously have our own political views though. I'm certainly left-of-center—I would be considered one of those "horrible" liberals down in your country—but that

wasn't the focus of the band. However, you can't get away from it in some songs. You definitely get a sense of a political bent, but that would never be the sole focus.

I can only think of a couple of pieces of yours that have any explicit political references. But even then they didn't seem to have any specific kind of agenda, like "Cats, Sex, and Nazis." Then again, you're one of the only bands—if not *the* only band—that has ever used a Martin Heidegger quote, *The Worldhood of the World As Such*, for an album title!

[laughs] My brother was very engrossed in German philosophy. Now he's engrossed in some Buddhist teachings. Maybe the next album will have more of a religious bent to it, I don't know. [laughs] The point is that all of these parts of our lives filter into the music—and we're not afraid of that. That's when music is going to be most effective—when you can learn something about yourself from it. Our approach to music was not so much writing rocking tunes that people could dance to—even though we've always wanted our music to do that—we've always wanted our music to cut a little deeper.

Sure. It certainly comes across that way. Take a song like "The River": It's hard to say what the piece is exactly about, but the abstraction lends itself to an experience of depth that really epitomizes the best aspects of your work.

Yeah, that song is very popular. It's not the kind of song that you can put your finger on, but you can't help but feel *something* about it. You can't help but feel as though you're affected by it. That's when I think music is at its most effective, at its most useful—when it touches you, but not your intellect—you can't explain it. You feel things, but you don't know why you're feeling them. It tweaks you. It's music that doesn't go in one

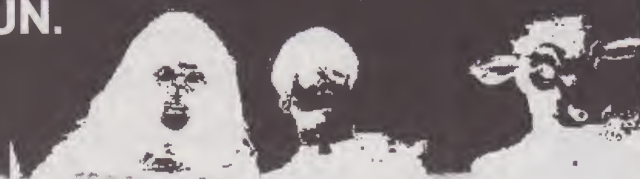
ear and out the other. When you can have that happening live, in a room where the majority of people are all feeling something, sharing the same feeling at the same time, it is a very powerful form of communication. But it's not *intellectual* communication. It's not the abstract words and ideas—it's something far more direct, and thus can be far more disturbing. If we can achieve that, then we're very successful. I don't think it's something you learn. It's something that happens. It's something that develops in you. ¶ Take Tom Waits, for instance. What his songs are about is irrelevant, it's the way they make you *feel*. He's great at it too. Waits is one of those artists who cuts through the intellectual drivel and hits something far deeper. It's not necessarily the words and their meanings that do it, it's just how it's all put together—how the music is and how it's sung that makes the difference.

Would you say that this is one of the main reasons why NoMeansNo remains such a vital project for all of you to continue pursuing over the long term?

Because we enjoy what we do, it remains fresh all the time. Because we're not simply playing the game of selling records—which you have to do a little bit, like doing this interview with you—we just enjoy playing the music and finding that inspiration every time we get in the zone, so to speak. As long as songs continue to develop in that respect and you still feel excited about what you're doing, then this comes across to your audience. The audience knows when you're really into what you're doing. We've been able to maintain that over the years.

Over the years, you've spent a lot of time playing in Europe and you now have a European deal for your label, Wrong Records, with

**MUSIC IS FUN AND IT SHOULD BE FUN.
WE TRY TO MAINTAIN THAT FUN**



Southern. What is it about Europe that has been so good to NoMeansNo?

Alternative Tentacles was a very good thing for us in Europe because Jello was very respected. People were very curious about us just because we were on AT. Back then, the timing was good too, because there was a real keen interest in North American punk rock—they hadn't been utterly *inundated* yet, so no one was jaded. We caught that wave and we did good shows. People really enjoyed it, and took us at face value. We didn't have to legitimize ourselves with interviews in *Spin* and blah, blah, blah. We came, we played, they loved it, and came back for more. Which is essentially the way we've always done it. ¶ In Europe, generally, some of the simple logistics—the fact that promoters could put on shows and sell beer to everybody—you're not driven out of business by drinking age bills and insurance bills and all of those things that work against promoters in North America—meant it was much easier to continue putting on shows. There was a real support network for bands. It wasn't a big money-losing thing, which can be really hard on alternative and indie bands. You didn't need to be a big band and you could make some money in Europe. All of these things combined helped us gain our success over there, and helped us back in North America as well.

When I lived in Toronto, NoMeansNo were always regarded as a seminal Canadian band, on par with punk bands like DOA and even alongside more mainstream bands like Bachman Turner Overdrive and Rush. [laughs] What's it like occupying that kind of space these days?

[laughs] It doesn't have a great deal of bearing on us. We've always toured just about everywhere in the world the same amount. We don't concentrate on our own home-

town or country any more than we concentrate on anywhere else. We've obviously had great success here, but no more so than anywhere else. It has had its ups and downs; some are better and some are worse. Lately, there's a lot of young people here who don't know too much about us because we got lost in the rap/hip-hop *Much Music/MTV* kind of crowd. That's fine. We've never really pursued it. We've remained under the radar of the mainstream press. We haven't gone to great lengths to hire publicists and all that sort of stuff. We prefer to remain in the background.

Why?

We try to avoid the limelight. When you get involved in that end of the business, it becomes an incredible distraction. You get lost in the world of record sales and publicity deals, publishing deals, and photo opps—all the bullshit around the business that we wanted very little to do with. It didn't do harm to our reputation, but we obviously didn't become a big band because of it. We didn't sell a million records or become a household name. But our music is not that kind of mass marketed work anyway. Once you get into that game, the pressures to become a marketable commodity for bands like ourselves is the death knell.

But you earn a living off of your work, right?

Yes, we do earn from our music, but mainly from our touring. And AT was great—we did sell records. But right now, we're *struggling* to sell records, just like a lot of people. Who knows, CD sales are one of those things that could go by the wayside. However, we've always concentrated on playing live and developing our audiences. That's always been our main focus.

Which NoMeansNo record do you think communicates yourself and the band's ideas most fully?

We were just learning a few old songs from *Why Don't They Call Me Mr. Happy?* And we all pretty much agreed that that was our best overall effort, in terms of bringing all of the elements of the band together. It's always been my favorite record. I like other records better for certain things, but as an overall album from beginning to end, the songwriting, the ideas, the production and flow of the album, aside from a couple of problems—the horrendous guitar sound on "The River," for instance—is my favorite.

Which record of yours did the best commercially?

Hands down, *Wrong* is our most popular album. It continually outsells the rest of our catalogue. It's a great collection of songs, has a good atmosphere, and has great energy. But it also lacks here and there a bit of depth. It just doesn't seem to go off in all directions, like our other records. It's a pretty straight-ahead rocking record from beginning to end.

What are the band's goals for the future?

We never really set goals in that respect. I'd hope that we come up with a great set of songs that we enjoy playing that makes us feel like we can put everything behind us. That's *always* the hope. But you never know. It's always a crapshoot. As an artist, you're always worried that you're not going to be able to do it again. That remains to be seen.

If you have any advice for a young artist starting out today, what would it be?

The best thing to do is play—it doesn't matter who you play to. You don't need a record contract and you don't need to spend a lot of money recording—what you need to do is play your music in front of people and grow and learn from those experiences. That's the best thing you can do. If other good things happen, they'll happen. But nothing good is going to come of it if you're not satisfied with what you're doing and you're not focusing on the music. Which is really what you should be doing it for in the first place. ©

**YOU DON'T NEED A RECORD CONTRACT AND
YOU DON'T NEED TO SPEND A LOT OF MONEY
RECORDING—WHAT YOU NEED TO DO IS PLAY
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hairstyles of the damned

a novel by joe meno

"The other problem I had was that I was falling in love with my best friend, Gretchen, who I thought the rest of the world considered fat. We were in her crappy car and singing, and at the end of the song "White Riot," the one by the Clash, I realized by the way I was watching her mouth pucker and smile and her eyes blink and wink, we were way more than friends, at least to me. I looked over at Gretchen driving and she was starting to sing the next song, "Should I Stay or Should I Go Now?" by the Clash again, and I said "I love driving around with you Gretchen," but because the radio was so loud, all she could do was see my mouth move."

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Neurosis—guitarist/vocalists Steve Von Till and Scott Kelly, bassist/vocalist Dave Edwardson, drummer Jason Roeder, and keyboardist Noah Landis—was born out of Oakland, California's hardcore scene in 1985. Over the course of eight studio albums, Neurosis has tempered their punk roots in the flames of metal crunch, experimental dynamics, a dense visual style, and spiritually-focused lyrics to become the world's most influential bona-fide thinking person's heavy-rock (dare we say metal?) band. Equally at home playing stadiums at Ozzfest or in the fiercely DIY clubs of the Bay Area punk scene, Neurosis is simultaneously global and local: a commercial success, and yet still a group that its fans can identify with and count as one of their own. It's no small feat for artists of Neurosis' stature, but, nevertheless, a testimony to their combination of hard work, artistic integrity, and principled outlook.

Starting out their career on artist Pushead's late, great Alchemy label with 1988's *Pain of Mind* LP, Neurosis went on to issue one of the very first full-lengths for Lookout! Records—1990's *The Word As Law*—followed by several albums for Alternative Tentacles and Relapse Records. Now issuing their own record—as well as that of artists such as Zeni Geva, ZG guitarist KK Null, Tarentel, and Oxbow—on their own Neurot Recordings label and curating the similarly eclectic Beyond the Pale festival, Neurosis have turned into a cultural institution essential to the health and well-being of contemporary underground music.

I spoke to Steve Von Till and Scott Kelly in between the release of their first collaborative album, 2003's *Neurosis & Jarboe*, and their brand new recording, 2004's *The Eye of Every Storm*. What transpired was a sweeping conversation about the nature of their creative energy, the dark philosophy of the band, and their almost two-decade-long insistence on pushing the boundaries.

Interview by **Ron Nachmann**

Photos by **Dianne Jones**

How did the new album with the Swans' Jarboe—*Neurosis & Jarboe*—happen?

Steve Von Till: It happened pretty organically. We'd been pretty huge Swans fans and she came to see us play in 1993 or '94. We started a relationship, talking about the spirit and intensity of music, and what should drive good music. After Swans broke up, we met up again and decided to make music. We talked about it for a while, but it always seemed to be when we were in the middle of making a Neurosis record. We were gonna start it with a skeletal piece of music, and the only practical way to do it seemed to be through the mail. ¶ When Jarboe performs, you can see in her body and in her eyes and hear in her voice that she feels the music much more than your average musician. She gives it 100 percent—you can see the energy flow right through her. It's visible; it's visceral. She does with her voice what we do with music, which is cover a broad range of dynamic and emotion. ¶ We started the project around '99. It's our first collaboration with anyone. We sat in the studio and carved drum loops from old master tapes. We used those rather than guitar riffs to pull it out of the regular Neurosis mode. We had to totally divorce the process from what we knew, so it became based around rhythm and texture first. The guitar, the riffs, and the arrangements came later.

Do you think that process has changed the way you make music?

Scott Kelly: It really helped. The process was new, but then again, we're hyper-critical of everything we do and we pick it apart to the point where we're just trying to get to a place where we've really challenged ourselves and met that challenge. It'll probably show more in time.

Your recording history is pretty linear that way: one thing leads to another.

Von Till: There's no going back. The day we don't outdo our last effort is the day we gotta hang it up, because that's when shit starts gettin' sad. Of course, that's opinion but luckily we're the only opinion we care about. We've been continuously outdoing ourselves since the beginning, and we've just done it again. We're basking in the glow right now because nobody's heard it and we know what we're sitting on. It's definitely our most far-reaching, challenging record to date, at least to write. We're exploring our depth of texture and emotion and have found ways to be more expressive and more of an original voice.

The East Bay hardcore scene that the band came from—specifically the New Method Warehouse in Emeryville—was pretty much booming, right?

Kelly: Speedcore was in the clubs—Attitude Adjustment, Sacrilege BC—and eventually a huge amount of bands fell into that. I remember specifically standing at a show at Ruthie's Inn with Dave and Jason, watching six bands and saying, "OK this is definitely what we don't wanna do." So we kinda sat down and picked a few bands that we felt were worthwhile. We analyzed each one, and decided that it's a commitment, an intangible dynamic. Neurosis spent its first two weeks sitting in a room and talking and visualizing the band as it is today—keyboards, visuals, everything. We weren't able to execute it all at the time, but we were able to focus and push each other. New Method was perfect for that because Crucifix, A State of Mind, Christ on Parade [for whom Noah sang and played guitar], and Fang were all there. Between us and Christ on Parade, you had seven people who spent most of our time there. It was a compound kind of atmosphere. At one point, I spent a whole year without leaving Emeryville, just going to the store across the street and going back. Everything we wanted or need-





NEUROSIS

ed was within those walls. ¶ We made music all the time, in the middle of this run-down, industrial wasteland that lent itself to us. There was lots of open space for your head to breathe, if not your lungs. We were pretty isolated, under the freeway. We were livin' and workin' real hard, and expanding our minds pretty widely. You'd walk through that place and you'd hear Amebix comin' out of one room and Celtic Frost comin' out of the next, A State of Mind would be practicing. That place is still where we are, really.

Von Till: The Bay Area—the East Bay, specifically—had a darker, psychedelic edge to the music. I think you can trace it back to the area's rock scene in the '60s—there's always been something trippier happening in the Bay. There was something deep and psychological to tap into—something that linked to the gnarlier aspects of music. It was drawn from stuff like Black Flag and Black Sabbath to things like Pink Floyd and Discharge—big guitars were meeting stranger music without becoming the generic metal thrash stuff that seemed to be taking off everywhere.

Was Neurosis the only band that was exploring that widely?

Von Till: There were others doing it to different degrees. Christ on Parade also explored those aspects. Neurosis just took a bigger guitar angle on that kind of thing. We were into that devil's note, that dissonant chord. At the same time, we paid attention to groups like Die Kreuzen or Voivod, who weren't satisfied with just the bar chord and who wanted something a little stranger. Psychologically, even though Neurosis was pretty primitive and hardcore in the beginning, you could always hear tinges of what was coming next. Even when I joined, we weren't sure what it was gonna be, but we knew it would be sonically huge. We knew it would challenge our abilities and that we'd have to think outside the box. We knew it was gonna become something multimedia before that was a term people started throwing around. We knew it had to be visual and that it would have to expand musically.

As listeners, we hear a really dark path from "Cleansed" on *Enemy of the Sun* all the way through the long, dire arrangements on

***Through Silver and Blood* that you seem to emerge from into *Times of Grace*.**

Von Till: Exactly true.

What was going on there for you guys at that point?

Von Till: We were feeling an aggressive tinge on *Enemy of the Sun* and going deeper into the psychedelia. Like, "OK, let's go to the core, let's go to the center." You can hear how that went to dark places on *Through Silver*. That album hurt to write and play and record, and it sounds like it. It's physically draining, and repetitive, and hellish, though not in that mundane, death-metal way. In some ways it's over-the-top, like Wagner on a bad acid trip, but not refined like that. It's savage and beastly. It's confrontational with self and with circumstance. Some people make politically confrontational music, like "Hey, fuck you" or whatever. This was more about tearing yourself open, and looking at it, and justifying yourself.

Kelly: Personally, I'm not willing to go any darker than that. I hope to see no harder times than those. We made a conscious verbal and emotional decision that we needed to shed some fuckin' baggage. Anyone who's fucked around in those areas knows what I'm talkin' about. There's a vortex there that'll suck you in and bring you down. When you're out there playing 27 two-hour sets in a row of that material—devastation every single fuckin' night, layin' yourselves wide open, leavin' everything you have in the air—it opens up both you and even the audience to some bad shit. It was like a fuckin' spiritual war. That sounds dramatic, but it's true.

Was there a point where you thought that the process might not be worth it?

Von Till: You have to embody the emotions of the music, otherwise you're bullshit. It's not like, "Hey, you gotta rock out." This is what the music feels like. You have to leave your brain and let that energy flow through you so that you can deliver it purely. And you can hear it in *Through Silver*: It's intense, and it's not all positive. It was a cleansing time. We were lucky enough to be able to purge that shit. I feel sorry for the people that have that kind of energy but have no outlet to purge. That would be the end. We didn't avoid it—we

went right through it; we looked it in the face and wrestled with it for about four years. On *Times of Grace*, we'd crossed the threshold conceptually and lyrically, and we felt stronger, better, clearer, and more focused.

When the band started, did you identify at all with the punk ethic that so permeated the Bay Area at the time?

Kelly: In the Bay Area, punk became literally defined by three chords; if it wasn't somewhere between the Ramones and the Buzzcocks, it wasn't punk. We'd all been into punk since we were 12 or 13. We saw lots of the second-wave bands—Black Flag, the Misfits, Discharge—and loved it and still do. But the fashion aspect, the judgmental part, was bullshit. ¶ When we were banned from *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, we called Tim Yohannon and said "What the fuck?" and he told us we weren't punk. He said, "You guys are like King Crimson, and you're not gonna be in the magazine." And so we got cool with it, because we were just free to do whatever we wanted. When Gilman Street had to have a meeting about whether we could play there again after we had played four benefits there—two or three of them for the place itself—we just thought, "whatever." We had no time for boxes. If it moves you and has attitude, you have to go with it.

Von Till: I don't know that I would say this now because the punk ethic has continuously let me down, but from the beginning punk was always about "Fuck everybody else, I'm doing this my way. I'm gonna do something intense and honest and original." That's not the rule these days. Now, punk is a genre. I came later in the game—I'm kind of a metalhead that discovered stuff the long way. But I remember going to punk shows where every band sounded totally different. There'd be some performance art, there'd be like a quadriplegic with some strippers, some metal-tinged huge-guitar band, then a poppy band—it would be totally mixed. The bills we played on early on would be Neurosis, Green Day, Verbal Abuse . . . it was all over the map. You'd have a show with Conflict and the Bad Brains. In hindsight, the indie music scene was worse than the mainstream at pigeonholing bands in the long term. You



WE'VE BEEN CONTINUOUSLY OUTDOING OURSELVES SINCE THE BEGINNING, AND WE'VE JUST DONE IT AGAIN. WE'RE BASKING IN THE GLOW RIGHT NOW BECAUSE NOBODY'S HEARD IT AND WE KNOW WHAT WE'RE SITTING ON.



don't have those diverse bills anymore. You've got a post-punk bill, the retro-new-wave bill, the poppy-punk bill. There didn't use to be those specific scenes. It was much more liberated when it started, and it had a DIY ethic of put out your own records, book your own tours, and people weren't judgmental. That's what we still stand by. ¶ I don't know if that kind of openness exists except among music fans and acquaintances. It doesn't exist in the independent music industry anymore. The biggest mouths about punk gave us the biggest grief about being different, y'know? [laughs] We had keyboards, so we weren't punk, we were prog rock. But just because we evolve and don't want to sit in 1982—you can't take it out of the person. That stuff was so much a part of who we are as people, but that's why it survives so much better in people than in a scene. I think independent music as a whole *can* have that ethic, and we no longer need to define it with one of these genres.

How have you dealt with being courted by the majors?

Von Till: We flirted with it for a while. At a time where you feel betrayed by the ethics you fought for, you start to go, "Fuck all that. If it's all for one, then I'm all for one. I'll take each situation as it comes." But none of the major label scenarios really presented themselves where we could do it on our own terms. We would have these meetings that were fairly over-the-top for these people—we weren't kissing their ass.

We said, "Well, if we're gonna do this, the sky's the limit. Here's how we can see taking advantage of this and making it mutually beneficial." And they all probably thought we were crazy, 'cause we never talked to any of them twice. [laughs] It never presented itself in a realistic way. Even to those people we seemed like the freaks in the corner. Our new album is just gonna be on *Neurot in America*. Ultimately we feel like the black sheep on every label—even our own, y'know? [laughs]

I want to talk about your live show for a bit. How significant are the visuals you project to the overall impact of the live experience?

Von Till: For us, it wasn't a matter of hiring someone who made them, but a matter of us visualizing it and finding someone to run it. We really just sensed that two things get people down to their core: isolation or overload. Initially we strived for the overload, which was six slide projectors and two 16mm projectors loaded with archetypal imagery—beautiful, horrible, symbolic, fast, repetitious, strobe-like. So you have the tone of the music, which sets the emotional landscape, and the lyrics which give you only the underlying emotional framework and allows people to plug their own experience in. When you combine that with this rapid-fire imagery, you create a psychological and physical effect. ¶ We were inspired by the acid imagery of Jefferson Airplane and Pink Floyd, and the Del Vecchio technique from *Clockwork Orange*. Those gave us the impetus. It started off

grim, brutal, and intense and turned into something a bit more sublime. I think we've backed off, because mainstream culture has exploded into such a multimedia glut—commercials even look like our visuals used to. That seems to be the status quo. So now we're content with creating more of a dreamlike, meditative, textural mood—something that can help people lose themselves in the music.

Have you aimed to make the live show like a ritual, then?

Von Till: For us it's always been a ritual, at least since we became mature enough to understand that—it was a pretty mundane scenario that brought us around to realizing that. We played in early '89 at a little club with a band from Seattle called Coffin Break. There was nobody there, and it was a joke. We did our half-assed set and we didn't wanna be there. It was lame. They got up—and it was just us and three other people at this club—and they *rocked* it. We were like, "Whoa! We need to dedicate ourselves on that level." The whole notion of giving it your all, even to just one person, is pretty mundane, but it became our *standard*. It went from there to something more spiritual. ¶ This music is intense and important. We need to dedicate ourselves to it every time we play it. Finding that headspace is a ritual, to the point where oftentimes we've felt like we're just the medium for this music; we're not making it, we're just tapping in. *Neurosis* is a larger thing, not a construct, but an element.

It's a spirit that drives us. We're the ones who are fortunate enough to have met each other and discovered this, so that we can deliver it to people.

You guys have a clean, disciplined cut to your visuals that integrates aspects of Nordic spirituality. But some would associate that aesthetic with fascism and Nazism—how much shit have you taken for that?

Von Till: A bit, from ignorant people. Neurosis is about looking at humanity as a whole—in its ugliness and beauty, in its evolution from its first thought, from its survival. Clouding up anything so ancient and spiritual as a reference to Nordic or Germanic or Celtic mythology with racism or fascism is so stuck in the 20th century. That's just not where we are. We get down to the *primal*, which is similar among people who live in similar conditions—people who live in the nature of their areas, with their gods and beliefs. People who find the spiritual in lightning and thunder, who hunt and gather—that's universal to humanity. That's where we are. The five of us have different cultural backgrounds—there's no Neurosis slant on mythology. All my ancestors are from Northern Europe, and I'm totally proud of that and I study it. People

can twist that backwards on itself all they want, but anyone who knows where we're coming from knows that we don't believe that you make yourself taller by chopping someone's head off. ¶ The only real trouble we've gotten for that shit is in Germany, which has a hard time accepting itself. I don't wanna get in trouble for saying that, so maybe I should stop now, but they have a cultural psychosis, cuz that's where it went down. As a result, being proud of anything Germanic is a no-no. That means you have to deny thousands of years of the heritage of the ancestors buried under their feet because of some fuckin' fascist bullshit.

As a Jew whose mother escaped Germany in the '30s, I see a real cultural schizophrenia going on there.

Von Till: Their anti-fascist movement is the most fascist you'll ever see, because they won't talk about it. In order for humanity to evolve, we *need* to talk it out. Half of Neurosis is Jewish, so if anyone comes at us, it's like "What the fuck are you talking about?" As far as the visuals go, if we're talking about the whole of human emotion, why isn't it OK to feed on something *that* intense? If we're trying to resemble something like the soundtrack to the apocalypse,

what better shit to feed on than a mixture of ancient symbols and war? We showed concentration camp footage at shows in Germany, and that pissed people off. And it was like, "You know what? So what? Fuck you. Our grandfathers fought your grandfathers over this shit, and this guy's grandfather died over there . . ."

Like, deal with it.

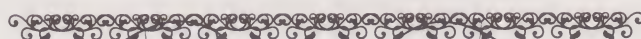
Von Till: Yeah, take it. I'll even go so far as to say that if you can't befriend someone with extremely different opinions, what's this whole bullshit about communication? Do you just wanna preach to the converted all the time? Do people do activism to hang out with each other in a support group, or are they going to go out and find people with different opinions and try to find common ground? *That's* where deep music speaks—to commonality, to the spirit.

I know the band doesn't have an identifiable set of politics, but do you, personally?

Von Till: Not really. I think politics is for the politicians and they're all crooks. On the other hand, we live in an extremely privileged society, and as much as we cry and bitch about it, and think some things are unfair and can come up with a lot of



IN THE BAY AREA, PUNK BECAME LITERALLY DEFINED BY THREE CHORDS; IF IT WASN'T SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE RAMONES AND THE BUZZCOCKS, IT WASN'T PUNK. WE'D ALL BEEN INTO PUNK SINCE WE WERE 12 OR 13. WE SAW LOTS OF THE SECOND-WAVE BANDS—BLACK FLAG, THE MISFITS, DISCHARGE—AND LOVED IT AND STILL DO. BUT THE FASHION ASPECT, THE JUDGMENTAL PART, WAS BULLSHIT.





conspiracies, the fact is that it's stable enough for us to have what you and I are involved with. My only politics—and probably the band's—is that we ought to leave a world that our children can live in. I don't wanna define that as far as nations or what the society ought to be. But you oughta be able to breathe the air, drink the water, have a place where nature can continue to be inspirational and sustain us. I don't think that's politics—that's common sense. I don't subscribe to a dogma that thinks it can bring it about, because there's always two sides of a story. You just have to be strong enough to evolve and survive in the face of whatever comes, and I think that means transcending politics.

What inspired the Beyond the Pale festival?

Von Till: We were sick of touring and not happy with the tours themselves. We were playing a lot of compromised shows with bands we had no business playing with, just to try to live off it. After we stopped that, we backed up, strengthened our stance,

and worked towards a more sustainable, satisfying way. We wanted to define our music in terms of our peers and community: this is the music we like; these people make intense, original music, they're our musical brethren. If we stay off the road for a while, let's do four unbelievable nights a year. ¶ By the second year, it got a bit too much—it put us in the roles of promoters, which blows. The first was magic, so overwhelming—we had our heroes and friends, people we've admired all coming and playing. The club was into it and so was the crowd. People couldn't believe the bills, but to us it just made sense. It was going back to the shows that blew your mind: Zeni Geva, Oxbow, Neurosis, Shellac, Savage Republic, Steel Pole Bath tub . . . It was magic, a way to nurture the culture and define ourselves on our own terms.

What does 19 years of Neurosis mean for you?

Von Till: It's a huge accomplishment. A lot of our favorite bands didn't exist more

than five or 10 years. I've watched a million great bands not able to deal with the personality bullshit, or put effort into getting past it. We've all been through those challenges, but we were able to get over it for the sake of the higher good. We believed in our music enough to get past that shit. We crawled out of this punk/independent/DIY thing that wasn't defined, and we took those ethics and ran through a million different things. And we were always the freak in the corner. That we can keep outdoing ourselves and keep making our best record yet—we're proud of that. And with Neurot Recordings, we've been able to put out other music that would've been otherwise ignored.

Kelly: This band is who I am. Before Neurosis, I was searching. I found something that I could do well and feel good about. The commitment we made is everything. You can't fuck with it, when you sit in a room 19 years ago and decide on something that'll last until somebody's in a pine box. Our drive is pretty damn strong. ©

DESCENDENTS

**If I had some legacy, this would be it:
*that people can be dorks and still be in a band.***

Too many times that day I had already called Colleen, who was this girl I like-liked, a really decent girl with a bright, easy laugh—and your typical meathead boyfriend. I knew my feelings for her were hopeless, but when her mom finally answered and said, beleagueredly, “*please* just stop calling,” I knew it was definitely going nowhere. I put down the phone and looked at it hatefully, like *it* was the reason nothing was going right for me. I crept into my bedroom and put on my headphones, popped in a mixtape my good pal Sue had made me, and I hit play. What I heard right away was:

My day will come! / I know someday I'll be the only one.

That was the moment—right then—that I heard the Descendents for the first time. It was my junior year in high school. The girl I wanted didn't want anything to do with me; my parents were getting divorced. It seemed at the time that just about everything was going badly. So I let the mixtape play.

What filled my ears was so honest and so personal. It was the first time I had heard punk songs that were more than just angry, fast, and loud. It was like someone was singing the exact words to how I was feeling about *everything*. I went out and immediately bought as many of their records as I could find—*ALL* and *Milo Goes to College*. Later came *I Don't Want to Grow Up* and *Enjoy*; soon enough, the Descendents were the soundtrack to the riotous world around me.

What got me wasn't just the great, punchy pop-punk sung against 100-mile-an-hour riffs, it was their sense of humor in songs like “Weinerschnitzel” and “Enjoy,” and their sense of realistic optimism with tracks like “Good, Good Things” and “Cheer.” Here was a band, unlike so many other punk bands at the time, that wasn't afraid to look forward to better days, when a few things might change. More personal than the Reagan-era criticisms of the Dead Kennedys and less pious than the lyrics of Minor Threat, here was a band singing about the exact feelings I was struggling with, but without any amount of self-pity. Instead, they overcame the great teenage drama with humor and energy.

That sense of positive anticipation has continued over the years, ironically informing their last release, 1996's *Everything Sucks*, with superior, grown-up tracks like “We” and “When I Get Old.” Now Milo Aukerman and the Descendents return yet again, after a seven year break, with the four song EP *'Merican*, on Fat Wreck Chords, a prelude to the full-length *Cool to Be You*.

Listening to the new EP is like running into one of your best pals from high school: a reunion of sorts; a necessary and important reckoning to see what in the world has changed, and what keeps changing for the better. Milo has gone to college, grad school, and studies beyond and is now living on the East Coast, working as a research scientist in biochemistry, with his wife, their son and a new daughter on the way. Speaking with him about growing up punk and facing the equally strange world of adulthood helped to reassure me that getting older does not mean giving up.

Interview by **Joe Meno**

Illustration by **Dustin Mertz**



D.M.04

In many jobs, you just don't have the creative outlet that you'd like. It made me direct my energies towards always having some kind of creative outlet.

So why a new record now?

We don't really have a timeline for doing our records. Each of them comes after some period of inactivity. I would say that is mainly my fault. I just have other aspirations.

Like your work in biochemistry?

Yeah. We did *Milo Goes to College*, and there was a three year break before the next set of records. Then there was an eight year lag between the Descendents' *ALL* and *Everything Sucks*. We just tend to put them together when we can reconnect with each other. I stay connected with those guys by being a fan of their band, ALL. I just can't be a professional musician.

So you had to make a choice between research science and making music?

I just couldn't tour and be in a band. Bill [Stevenson, the Descendents' drummer] has been really supportive of my whole deal. Whenever I decide OK, I want to be a scientist again, he'll be like, "OK, fine."

So what brought you back after seven years?

It was a totally unconscious set of situations, one of which was me just at some point deciding I needed to take these music ideas and get them down on tape. I had all these songs I'd been playing around with and I decided to put them down on a four track. I put together a demo tape at home. I had never really done that before. I had my own bass, guitar, and drum machine and I just piped it all into this demo thing and then I did vocals over it. My wife *hated* the way it sounded, but it was good enough to give the band the basic gist of the songs. As it turns out, that's how the rest of the band had been writing their songs! Which isn't to say there isn't some amount of collaboration, but in terms of my songs, I was working alone because I'm out on the East Coast.

To me, the greatest measure of your music is how honest and personal it has always felt. From songs like "Hope" and "I'm Not a Loser," with their teenage concerns about feeling frustrated in high school, to material like "When I Get Old," about the frustration of finding meaning as an adult. What events or moments from your life are you now drawing from for your songs on the new record?

The songs now are about dealing with our current relationships. In the case of Bill, his father died last year and he wrote a song about it. Then he wrote a song about his adopted daughter and that situation. We can only draw upon personal events in our lives. That's the only way we know how to write.

Your most significant change thematically seems to be the EP's title song "Merican," which has a strong political message. You sing, "I'm proud and ashamed every 4th of July / You've got to know the truth before you say that you've got pride." Is the song a reaction to recent events—the war in Iraq, Sept. 11th, or the Bush administration?

Carl wrote it but I think we are all similar-minded. It's true we don't usually have a lot of political content, but it was something we could all get behind. I mean I watched September 11 and I just was blown away—it was the most devastating thing to ever have happened. But then to watch how, over the next couple years, the country went so over-the-top with its jingoism, that to me was a kind of knee-jerk reaction to September 11. For every bad thing that's happened to us, we've done bad things to other countries.

But what's interesting is that the Descendents have always been mistakenly considered "unconcerned" with politics. But I think a song like "Suburban Home" stands as a political commentary on life in suburbia in the 1980s.

With this new record, are the politics in your songs becoming more overt?

I think "'Mercian" is a bit of an anomaly, which is why I like it. In previous songs, there's no overt political statement, but there *are* undertones. But I don't think we're going to become highly political all of a sudden.

The last time I saw you guys play, you did "I'm not a Loser." It came off like an anthem, with 2,000 kids raising their hands in the air, shouting along together. It was this amazing statement of unity. At the time that you wrote that song, did you have any sense of the power your music might present?

I should mention that Frank Navetta, the original guitar player for the band, wrote that song. He was writing about being an outsider, but something began to happen to it on tour. We were writing about being outsiders, but there we were on stage, singing to like 2,000 kids. All of a sudden, you're not the outsider anymore. That's a weird incongruity: We write a song about being an outsider and people can relate to it. In that sense, there's solidarity.

It becomes a kind of unifying force, even though these kids don't know each other before they get to the show. It becomes this kind of communal . . .

Communal loserdom.

For at least those two hours, these people are together.

We basically took all our frustrations of high school life and spit them into music. To have other people relate was *completely* unexpected.

Do you feel like that puts a certain responsibility on your shoulders now?

So much time passes between each record.



I always feel like we're starting from square one. I have no idea how well this new record will do. For example, we're not touring for this record, which means you don't have a gold ticket. We just did this record for artistic satisfaction. I said to Bill, "I've got these songs," and he said, "Cool, we've got these songs—let's do them all." It was a very satisfying experience, because I've always had this musical outlet where I call up Bill, my best friend, and say "Hey, do you want to do these songs?"

So how did that relationship begin with the band in the first place?

The way it worked was the Descendents had been a trio before I joined. They had put out this single, but they had no way to distribute it. Bill, who went to my high school, would just show up at lunch and try to pedal it. He'd walk up to the preppies and the jocks—the people we hated—and he'd say "Hey, buy my single," and they'd tell him to get lost. But I bought one, and I was completely blown away. At that time, I was getting into a lot of hardcore music—the Germs, Black Flag, X—so I was ready to hear new music like that. My buddy said "Oh, you know the Descendents practice at The Church." The Church was this run-down place where all these bands like Black Flag and Red Kross practiced, and I went down and watched them practice. At some point they started playing "Ride the Wild," and I just kind of said "Step aside, I can sing that." I can't believe I did it, thinking back on it. I think they were kind of playing some instrumental, or whoever was supposed to be singing wasn't, and the mike was just sitting there, so I said "OK, I'll do it." Later, Bill told me, "You weren't really that good, but you had a lot of spazoid energy." So that worked out really well.

How did playing in a band change you?

More than anything, it forced me not to be such an introvert. I would get so nervous on stage, but I'd act like a total spaz and that got me out of my shell. It opened up the notion to me that the most important thing is to be creative. Creativity is something you have to fight to retain in your life. In order to make a living, sometimes you may have to take this or that job and that just seals your fate. In many jobs, you just don't have the creative outlet that you'd like. It made me direct my energies towards always having some kind of creative outlet.

How did the band develop after you joined up?

We spent a lot of time wood-shedding—just practicing seven days a week, trying to figure our sound out. We did the *Fat* EP in 1981 and *Milo Goes to College* in 1982. It kept evolving. The band had started out as surf punk and then we started drinking a lot of coffee and evolved into a really fast hardcore band. Then we discovered girls, and so the songs started to be about girls. And we played around LA and would go up to the Bay Area to play shows.

What was your first show like?

That was at the Hong Kong Cafe and I was a nervous wreck. I was probably frozen at the mike. I knew what to do—we had been practicing for three or four months—but as far as stage presence, there was like none. We did songs like "Statue of Liberty," "Kabuki Girl," and "Hey, Hey," from the *Fat* EP, but there were also a lot of songs that didn't ever see the light of day.

Looking back at almost 25 years of the Descendents, what are the songs that really endure for you?

You mentioned "Hope." That's one I have a soft spot for.

What is it about that song?! Every time I talk

to someone, and the Descendents come up, we always talk about that song.

That was me basically being unable to get the girl, but I can't fully explain it. To me, the subject matter is not that unique. There were bands that came before us, like the Buzzcocks, that were playing punk and were writing from a romantic perspective.

Was that song based on some personal experience?

Yeah, that's probably why I have a soft spot for it. That must come out in the song—the song itself is just lyrics and words, but somehow it says something more to people. I like it because it's one of the first songs I ever wrote, and there's no artifice to it at all—it's just me basically complaining about my life.

What's fascinating is that with songs like "Hope" and "Cheer Me Up," there was a sense of honesty, but also of possibility, which really set you apart from other punk bands of that era.

We always called those songs "cheesers." They were like these cheesy love songs, but those were the songs we were driven to write and play because they were the ones we were feeling. I find it hard to believe other people in the punk scene weren't feeling those same feelings. I'd like to say they didn't have the chutzpah to put them down on paper—it's not very "punk" to talk about those kinds of things.

How did writing about those bad relationships help? Was it cathartic?

Yeah. It would help because you would feel like there was some good that came out of it. I mean if your woman left you, writing about it didn't make her come back.

But at least you got a song out of it.

Yeah, it's kind of mercenary to say, but it's true: At least I got a song out of it.

We made our name being these young punks with songs like, "I Don't Want to Grow Up," but, well, guess what? We *have* grown up.

When you look back to that era, and revisit the ideas of ALL and songs like "ALL-o-gistics," which defined certain punk commandments, which of those ideas still inform the way you live today?

Probably the number one commandment I still live by is "Thou shall not suppress flatulence." That's the one I take more seriously than any of the others. Like, "Thou shall not drink decaf"? Well, I'll occasionally drink a pot of decaf now.

What about "Thou shall not commit adulthood?"

Well, that's one that, try as you might, you can't really fight. That one really relates to your overall view of the world. I still try to maintain a youthful outlook on life, but it gets harder when you have kids—or maybe it gets *easier* when you have kids because you can really feel youthful through your kids. There are many things about parenthood where you can feel the gray hairs emerging on your head, but at the same time there are aspects that make you feel more alive, more complete.

How do you balance all these different parts of your life: a musician, husband, father and scientist?

It's difficult. The way I've been able to do it and feel OK about everything is I have to treat music as a hobby, as something I do in my spare time.

When did you have to make that decision?

I've had to make that decision numerous times. Every time I've left the band it's because I've said, "I don't want to make a career of this." Whenever I've come back, it's because I wanted to take a break from my career. I have this very strong need to rock and a need to take care of that need. But it's only going to get more difficult for me, because of my family. I don't have a prob-

lem with that because I never wanted it to be a career. Also, making music a hobby can lead to some *good* art instead of some *bad* art.

I think that's what's interesting, that if you look at many of the bands who were putting out records in that same era and still continue to pursue music as a career—making music to make a profit—they've become these merchandise-driven spokesmen. It's clear that you're not doing this to make money to pay the pool guy.

To me, I've often thought the best music is made by amateurs and *not* professionals. If you look at how major labels make music—where it's all tied into commerce and they have a certain agenda and a certain radio sound they have in mind—that all trickles down to the artist. I like the fact that I can stay free from all those entanglements.

Is that what drew you to biochemistry?

Well, it's because I never really considered myself a punk scenester. I'd go see bands, but I never had an affinity for the punk scene itself—I just wanted to check out the music. What I did have was an affinity for academia and in the end, I feel like I made the right decision. At some point the draw of academia was just stronger than the draw of punk rock.

How did that interest come about?

I think in high school I gave a book report on DNA and I just thought, "DNA is pretty cool." My dirty secret is that before I was into punk, I was into New Wave, and Devo had this song, "Mr. DNA," and I thought: *DNA, that's really cool.*

I don't recall any science-oriented Descendents songs.

I tried writing a couple, but the subject matter

just didn't lend itself well to a punk song.

I don't want to tell you how to do your job, Milo, but maybe the next record could be all science songs?

Yeah, that will be a really good-selling record. People will *really* want to buy that!

Is there any similarity in your research work to what you do as a singer and songwriter?

I would say the creativity, though it's a different form. The best times I've had in both science and music is just me daydreaming about things. In music, maybe it's having a lyric or chord progression in my head and that evolves into a song. The same would be true for science, where I'm going through a particular experiment in my head; it's the same spark of creativity.

Creating something out of nothing?

Yeah. To me, that's really appealing.

So what are you working on now in your research?

I've been working on making corn a better-yielding plant through genetics. I work with a model organism, the weed *rabbits*—a really useful weed to test things out on—and whatever we learn on that, we can test out on corn.

What do your fellow researchers think about you? Do they have any idea you have this whole other life?

When I got hired here, I had to give a "job talk"—it's like an interview—and afterwards, two people came up and asked for my autograph. They came up with *Milo Goes to College* CDs. They were fans of the band and worked at the company. ¶ The other thing that happened was the guy that ended up hiring me had heard about my music and



asked, "Are you still doing it?" and I said, "Well, actually I sometimes guest sing with ALL, and they're playing tomorrow night in Philadelphia." I looked over and he had a gleam in his eye. The next night, he actually showed up at the show! I was up there on stage and I saw him out in the audience. I thought *oh, great, this is part of the interview—maybe if I don't sing well, he won't give me the job.*

So what was his reaction?

Well, I got the job, so I guess it worked out OK.

How has being a scientist, a husband, and father—soon to be of two—changed you as a musician in terms of your process of writing songs? Do you have less time to put songs together?

In music, I've always worked in spurts. The songs on this new record are from a period of a few months in a kind of creative high. It might be that you have a certain allotment of creative energy and you apply it to wherever you can.

Your wife seems very supportive of your music. How did your relationship develop? Was she a fan of the band?

She was an undergrad at UC San Diego and I was a grad and we traveled in the same circle of friends. I wasn't her TA or anything, she was in a different field. She said she "thought" she saw us play on campus but thought it was the Adolescents. That's how much she knew of our music. She knew our music, but she wasn't the hugest fan or anything. She realized what she had gotten herself into when she went back to her home town and said, "I'm dating this guy Milo," and people started freaking and saying "That's the guy from the Descendents!" We share the same love of music, liking punk

rock, and the same background. She wasn't a fan that I started dating or anything.

And now you two have a boy of a year and a half and a girl on the way? Descendents of the Descendents?

Well, Bill Stevenson was the first one to have a kid. His first kid is actually adopted from a previous marriage. When he first started going out with his wife, I was blown away. It was a major, grown-up thing to do. I was like, "You're dating a woman who has a child?"

That's terrifying.

Yeah. He kind of led us all into adulthood with that.

So how has your life in music and science prepared you for being a father?

I would hope that I can instill some kind of enjoyment of music in my kids. We're always playing music and I'll play my music for my son, because I know if I don't play it now and try to play it later, he'll be like, "What is this crap you're playing, dad?" and I'll just be *crushed*. I'm hoping to instill a sense of creativity in my kids.

In what ways has your reason for making music changed over the past 20 years?

I don't think it's changed at all. For me, the way I write, I have to have a bone to pick. That's always how it's been. More than likely, my songs will continue to be little bits of angst I've got to get off my chest.

Do you feel like at this point as a band, you still have something to prove?

I think so. When we started making the new record, I was struck by how different in content the songs were. It was not just business as usual; it felt like it could be quite a different species. We were taking a risk,

putting ourselves out there. It was us saying, "Here we are, here's where our lives are: Take it or leave it." And where we are now is completely different than where we were before. We made our name being these young punks with songs like "I Don't Want to Grow Up," but, well, guess what? *We have grown up.*

Looking forward, another 10 years into the future, do you see a continued pattern of recording and touring again, when you think it's time? Is this the way you see yourself living the rest of your life?

Each time I do something like this, I have to withhold any expectations about the future. I'd like to leave the door open to making more music. But with each passing year, with each new phase of my life, it becomes clear that the future holds more recorded music, but probably not live.

Is there something you want to leave behind, some legacy you want to be remembered for?

I'm mostly proud of being a geek and being able to get up on stage and announce that to the world. One of my favorite bands of all time was the Minutemen and to see D Boon—this *huge* behemoth—sweating from every pore, 300 pounds of rock and roll, basically threatening to make a hole in the stage every time he jumped in the air, well, he was my hero. I aspired to be like that: To be the anti-hero hero. If I had some legacy, this would be it: *that people can be dorks and still be in a band.* In that sense, it's no different than any other punk band—the basic premise being that anyone can do it—but I'm just saying, anyone can do it and you don't have to be cool. In that way, we've never been very punk. We just wanted to

"There is something happening here more than just kids and guitars."

Those aren't my words. They are in fact those of another author, from the first interview with Q And Not U that ran in this magazine 23 issues ago. I have to admit, they don't seem to make much sense now. When I think back on the little band from Washington DC that was featured in that interview, kids with guitars seems like a pretty much spot-on description of what they were. There was nothing ground breaking, nothing earth shattering, and certainly nothing I expected to be reading about—much less writing about—four years down the line.

My, how things have changed.

"That does seem like a long time ago," guitarist Chris Richards says with a laugh, thinking back to his first talk with *Punk Planet*. "To think of how the world around us has changed personally and how the political climate has changed globally. Thinking about that really has thrown me for a trip."

Make that two of us. It is rather difficult to think of how far things have come in the five years since that initial interview, and even though I've been a casual friend to the band—Richards and myself, along with Q And Not U's drummer John Davis, were all editors of like-minded fanzines near the end of the decade, which found us crossing paths fairly often—this particular transformation was one that I would mostly view from a distance. Logic was that the further away I stood, the easier it was to see things bolster as the band began releasing a handful of records that followed a determined commitment to constant improvement. With

their first two full-lengths—2000's *No Kill No Beep Beep* and 2002's *Different Damage*, both on DC stalwart Dischord Records—they seemed able to redefine a long-lamented sound and vision for a whole new generation of bands in the nation's capitol. What at first felt strange to read soon turned to fact: The band became something more than just kids and their guitars. These days you barely have to blur your eyes to see the baton being passed from some of the pioneering artists that fill this issue's pages to Richards and his humble bandmates.

Of course, that's only half of the story. As you page through this issue you'll find a wide mix of personalities who find comfort in their roles—some as preachers, some as poets, some as a mixture of the two—and they should be able to tell you whatever it is you want to hear. That's never been the case with Richards. He's always wanted to hear whatever it is that you have to tell. While he may not have as many years of experience in the underground, he does have one of the purest and most vital outlooks of almost anyone I know. So even when it may feel like Richards and I are bickering with each other in the discussion below—going back and forth about his hometown's politics and its flaws and its limitless beauty—know that this is only because he's just as interested in your place in this world as he is his own.

"I didn't even feel like a musician when I joined this band," he will admit as we settle down for a couple hours of reflection. "I was always more involved in the communication of this." Things have changed, sure—but it's clear that some things will always stay the same.

Interview by **Trevor Kelley**

Photos by **Shawn Brackbill**

Q & not
A



We're not kids anymore
and we don't have any
illusions about trying to
suspend our youth.

So we're around the same age, right?

Yeah, I'm 24.

On a personal level, do you see people looking at you differently now?

You know, I haven't noticed it yet. I was actually reading this book today and there was this great passage where the narrator said, "You're not getting older, everyone around you is getting younger." I thought that was kind of a beautiful way of looking at it. We've been a band now for five years. We're not kids anymore and we don't have any illusions about trying to suspend our youth. American culture obviously has a serious youth fetish, but you can't escape growing up. [laughs] Eventually you've got to lose your hair and get fatter.

When you started this band, people probably saw you occupying that exact position—you were "the kids." But I definitely feel like that's starting to change.

Yeah, I hope so.

Did you ever think you'd stick around long enough to see that occur?

No, definitely not. I don't even know how long we'll be at it now. The one thing we had to learn is that nothing is certain. This is such a rollercoaster ride that you can't predict how it will go. I would love for our band to have a Sonic Youth-like lifetime, where we can be playing into our 40s, making great records all the while. But I'd be totally content if it ended tomorrow, too.

What do you remember most from that period when the band first formed?

I remember that there wasn't a lot going on in DC at the time, and I think there was an outsider attitude where people thought that the younger bands couldn't make a name for themselves. I still talk to a lot of bands in DC that feel that way. But what everyone forgot is that all you have to do is play and

pour your guts out, and pretty soon people are going to pick up on what you do. For me, that was a cool time. There were a lot of bands that were our peers and it felt like there was a very young thing going on in town. That was something we tried to reflect with the record cover for the first album. All the people on that cover were in bands from DC that were younger and that weren't really getting noticed. It really felt like there was something new going on. It wasn't an organized effort, but it was still an effort. People just wanted to get out there and *play*. We wanted to show people what we could do.

At that time you and John and I were all doing our fanzines—and by extension covering nearly all of the same bands, a lot of whom were awkwardly rising to national prominence by playing tuneful punk. From my end, I remember a lot of people being stuck in the middle at that time.

You're talking about that whole emo ghetto?

Right—like the Promise Ring or Braid or what have you. On a certain level, those bands were too interested in commerce to be seen as truly punk, but too punk to make it commercially. Within that moment I remember a lot of bands trying to find a place between the two. In DC the same thing was occurring, only with different circumstances. But that's one of the things I immediately liked about *Q And Not U*: You found your place so naturally.

But when you talk about that very specific window of time, one of the things that you have to understand is that we really didn't have ambitions beyond playing in the basement with our friends. I know that sounds like I'm being demure, but it's totally true. This band was started so casually—we just got together to jam and thought maybe we'd play a couple of shows. Once we started playing out in DC, we could tell that we were having an effect on people. Lines of communication were beginning to happen.

We never formed under any sort of pretenses, really. This was started as a way to play music and as a way to share it with the people we cared about. But we soon realized that there was an opportunity to travel and an opportunity to go on tour. All of that stuff we hadn't planned on.

I'm sure that's true. But I think that it was pretty clear from the moment this band started gaining recognition that the rules you were playing by were much looser. In a way you really did redefine the vision of how DC operates.

Maybe we're too close to it and you can see that better. People have a lot of weird interpretations of how things work here, I guess. Everyone talks about how there is a Dischord "sound." We never believed in that or, frankly, even noticed it. I don't think anybody really did.

You would agree, though, that on a business level there are ways that bands on Dischord conduct themselves.

Oh yeah, absolutely.

When this band started, I didn't see you guys heavily taking part in that. You didn't need to. For people our age, Dischord has always been there. It's been an institution you could have around your entire life to look at when you wonder how this sort of thing should be done. The label's influence is so far-reaching it doesn't even need to be noted.

Well, everyone is a product of their environment. The DC scene always gets heavily mythologized and I have a knee-jerk reaction to that kind of stuff because I think it creates an unrealistic picture of what things are really like. As I travel and see how it is in all of these new cities, I really am proud of the fact that there are people here that are still involved and that are still going to see new bands all of the time. That doesn't exist in a lot of places. To be involved in that—or to even say that we are a product of that—is fantastic.

But you, like me, were growing up and writing about a different crop of bands that weren't completely opposed to the way mainstream artists were doing things. Because of that, I imagine, the way you approached this band has been a bit different. It's not like you've done a tour with an artist like the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, who are on the same major label as Eminem, but I don't think you'd be opposed to it. Hoover might have been.

That is true. [laughs] We grew up listening to this music and we saw early on that you didn't have to be a part of the media industry or the record industry—that was great. We saw that you didn't have to play the game to make great music, which was an exciting idea for us. ¶ But over the past two years, we've begun to feel like we've been doing the same thing, and reaching the same exact people. We want to continue to reach people as a band. We want a bigger audience. If we can do that in a way that doesn't compromise the music and the message we're trying to send, then we're going to do that. We have a booking agent now and we are thinking about doing different things to publicize the records a little more. When you participate with the record industry and you participate with the media, you do end up watering yourself down. Music is something with unlimited possibilities, but you can't expect unlimited possibilities to come out of a blurb in *Spin*. To me that's frustrating. So if there is a way that you can control that stuff in your own way, then that's great—but it's very difficult. We may have steered clear from it in the past, but I think we are going to try and do more things in the future.

As irreverent as this may sound, I like hearing that. When you signed to Dischord five years ago, I didn't see very much growth there. It may sound like I'm talking down about the label—and maybe I am—but I think noting that the times have changed around you is completely necessary. One of the more talked-

about articles I did for this magazine was about Vagrant Records. We didn't write that article because we vehemently liked or disliked the label. It was because that label represented a certain shift. I didn't always see Dischord noting such things. But I saw that with you.

That was nothing we were really conscious of when we started, though. We just did what we felt was natural. We didn't have a mission statement. We weren't sitting around at practice plotting our attention. What it comes down to is that we'd go out and play shows and get burned by bands that thought they were more important than us because they hired people to work for them. That informed the way we operated our band. We would often find ourselves in these situations where bands would have booking agents and tour managers and publicists and that would automatically make them more important. It was like, "We didn't sign up for this—I thought that we were playing in the underground."

Did you find yourself having to explain that to the people at Dischord?

What do you mean?

Well, this is a relatively new thing. Fugazi is probably the most peculiar anomaly there ever was. They never needed to seek a larger audience—in ways, they were almost seeking a smaller one—so it stands that they were never going to be affected by a band with a publicist or a booking agent getting a leg up on them. No one would have insisted that they should have headlined over Fugazi because they had a booking agent. [laughs] I really don't know how they could accurately grasp the way these changes could affect one of their bands.

I don't know either. The thing with Dischord and Ian is that they just drop you in the water and let you swim. We've never discussed any of this stuff with them. They do what they do, and we do what we do. It's

Everyone talks about how there is a Dischord "sound." We never believed in that or, frankly, even noticed it.





I think that a lot of good musicians don't make political *music*, they make music *politically*.

this wonderfully symbiotic relationship that we have with them and that we really enjoy. Everyone is doing different things and doing it at the level that they're comfortable with. Of course you are encouraged with every endeavor that you take on, but it's not like we have a mandate stating that we have to tour so many days out of the year like some labels do. Whenever a band gets involved with a major label or a quasi-indie label and I hear about some of the hoops they have to jump through, it's terrifying. That's shocking to me. I couldn't imagine someone saying we have to play a certain amount of shows a year. I don't like the idea of having to be forced to do anything.

We've never really had a heady discussion like this have we?

No, we haven't.

I have to be honest, I imagined that you would have been following me a bit more here. [laughs] Most people when I ask them questions like this for an interview in *Punk Planet*, I can almost predict what their answers will be.

But I can only speak for myself—which can be hard enough sometimes!

I feel like I'm pushing you into a corner here. I keep trying to get you to espouse some great political platform for this band, and you won't do it.

That's because that stuff really is secondary for me. I think that a lot of good musicians don't make political *music*, they make music *politically*. That seems like a more natural way of working for me. I don't want to be pre-meditating anything. I want to be conscious of what's influencing me and I want to surrender to what influences I feel are important. It's super-dangerous when people start writing manifestoes and start planning out what they're going to do—you end up destroying what music and independent culture engenders. If you just surrender to how things are naturally going to go and you care about what you do and you really work hard—then all of the other stuff will just fall into place.

Do you think you'll end up like some of the

other people in this issue—an icon?

One of the greatest lessons that this has taught me is that you should keep yourself open. You can't predict anything. I'm glad that I've stayed involved with this stuff this long and I hope that I continue with it. I really do admire the Ian Mackayes and Kathleen Hannas of this world who have dedicated so much of their time to moving this culture along, but you can really only live for the next thing. I can't believe people would set out from day one thinking that they have a lifetime of work ahead of them and that there's a certain way it's going to go. That's insane to me. There's such a huge element of chance to this and I feel like we are at the mercy of that. I think everyone who has been in this for a long time has really done it their own way.

What has doing things your own way meant to you?

In the beginning stages of our band, we hoped people would see where we stand by how we operate. We were coming from a scene where hardcore bands would get up on the stage and tell you about how a particular song was about the rights of a worker or whatever. I hope that we never come across that way. I think that people who really care about independent culture, the one thing they fear is that the audience will become really passive. They're afraid that it will become more like pop culture, where they'll take whatever it is you give them. But when you assume that, things can become super-sanctimonious. To me that seems really limiting to the music.

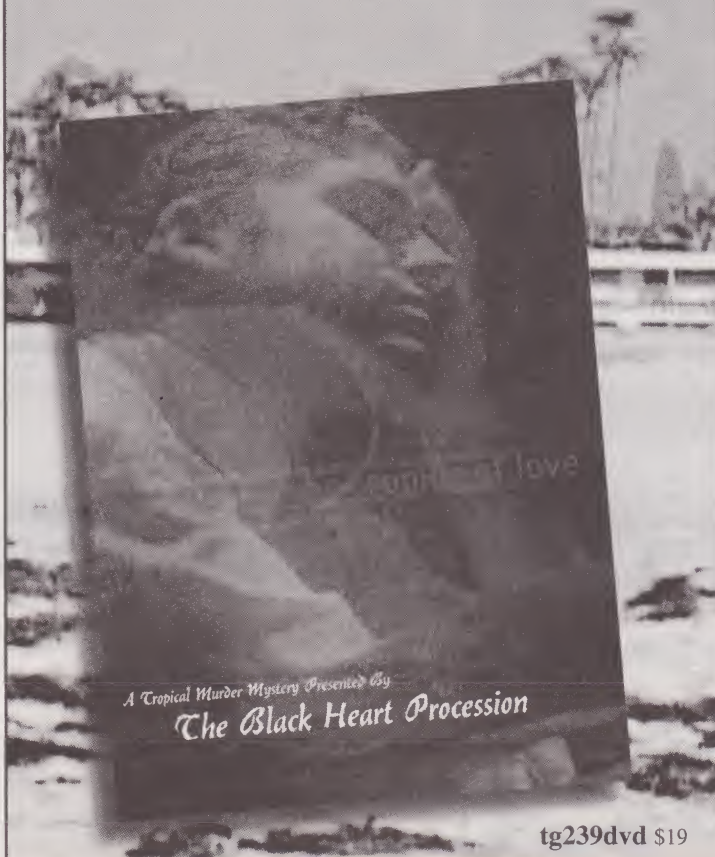
Which isn't what punk is supposed to be about.

No, it's supposed to be about *freedom*. For us, the thing that we keep coming back to is the music. Everyone who plays in this band has an insatiable appetite for music. John and Harris have given me such an awesome education in music that if I were to be really discouraged by who's signing to what label or how much a band got paid for the same club we played at last month, it's just like, who cares? There are a million dub records

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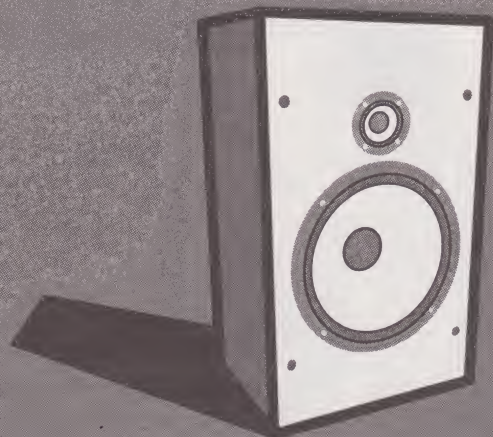
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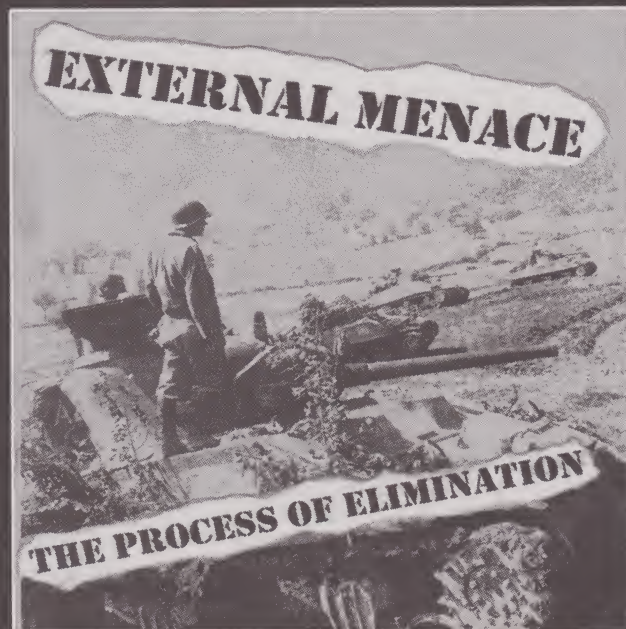
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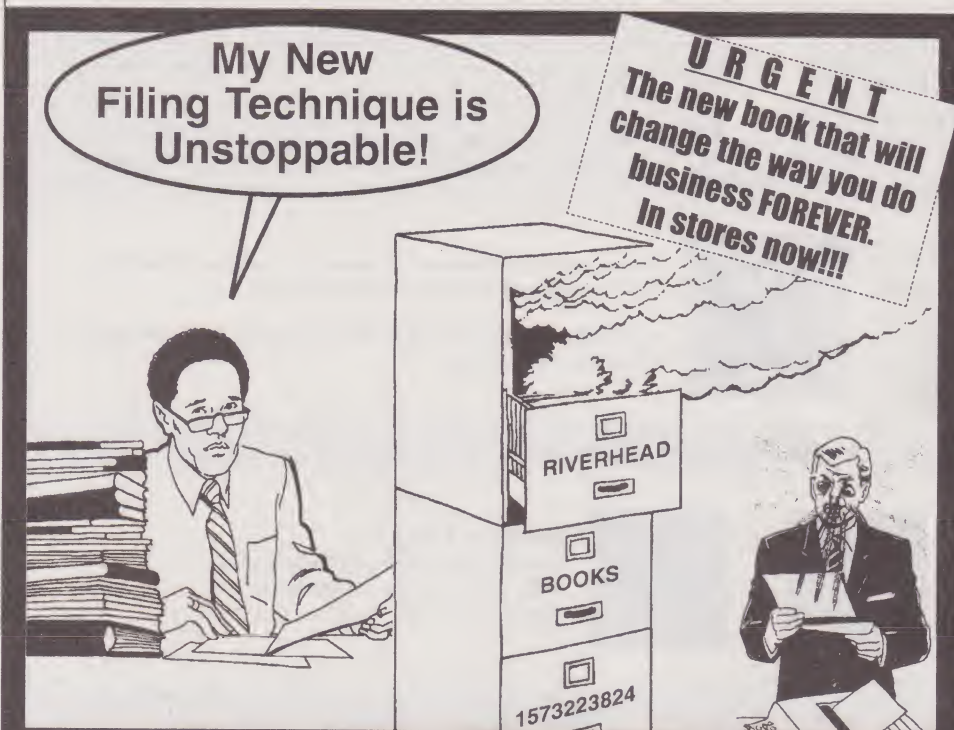


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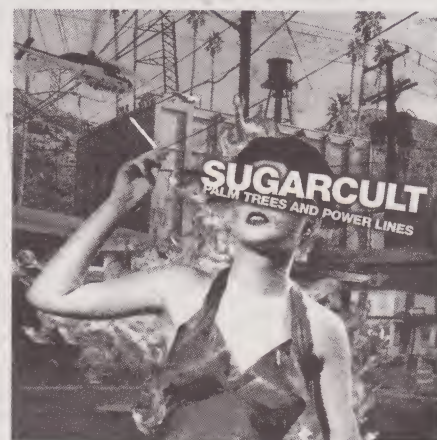
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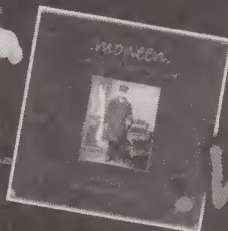
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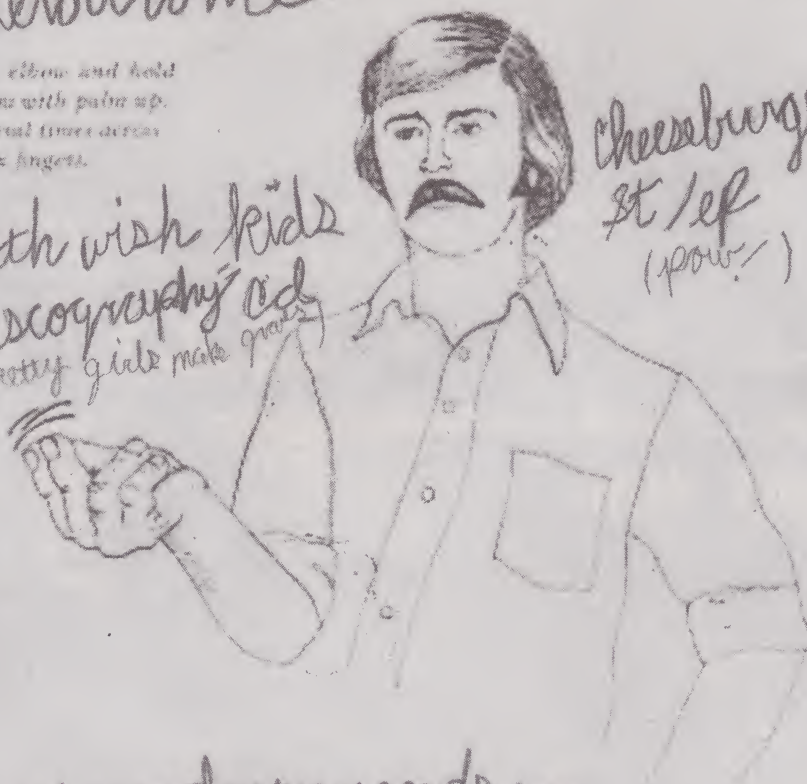
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131

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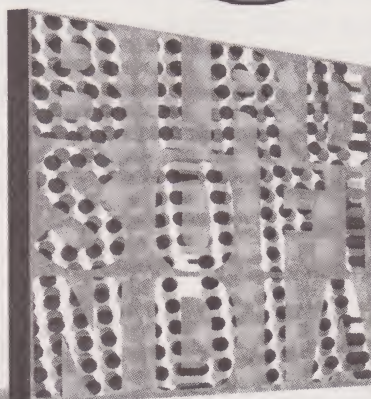
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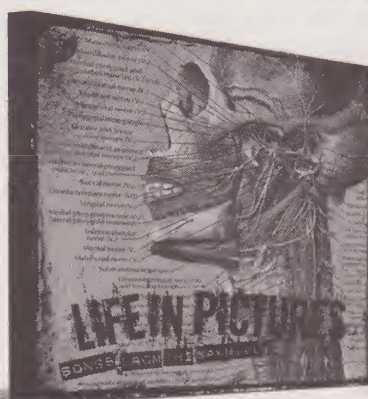


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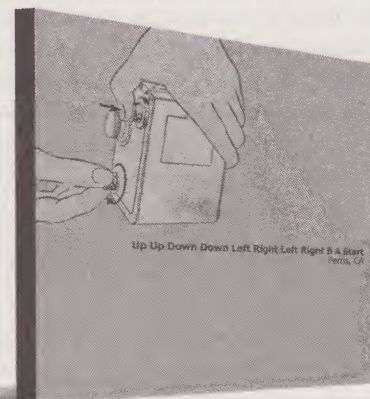
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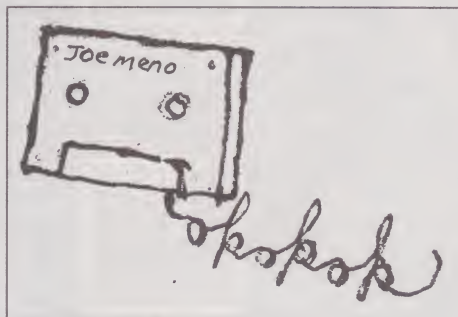
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Like any three-chord anthem

Out in the world I like to pretend I'm somebody important. I don't know why I do it.

It just happens. It

gets bad at rock shows, where I like to think maybe I am an A&R scout from some indie label with a million dollar contract, or an underground music critic, or some noble record store clerk who has an opinion that really matters to somebody. If you're like me at all, you do the same thing maybe. When you go to the Fireside Bowl in Chicago or the Middle East in Boston or whoever's basement they're now holding shows in outside of Cincinnati, what you do is rate the band. You think: *I have records. I must be an expert.* You notice the singer's way of wrapping the mike cord around his neck and think: *That's really original. Too bad Iggy did it like 30 years ago.* You listen to the guitar player and think: *Does this guy know how to play anything but power chords?* You listen to the drummer, remark that he's playing the same beat on every song. And the bass player, Jesus, the bass player. *Could you please, you think, justify your existence in this band?*

It's worse if you know the band you're seeing, like if it's your friend's band or something. Then you can be all kinds of shitty. Like if they pull out a Crass cover, you think: *Not one of those guys playing is a vegetarian, because you know they're all slaves to red meat.* Or if the singer is nervous and looks like she might cry, you know it's because she's got the most intense kind of stage fright ever, of all time. You know this poor band, you heard their stupid decision-making process as they decided to use the lousy name "The Deadly Mushroom Imperialists." You can see right through the noise from their Sears amps and their put-on swagger. You know they've only been playing together for a month and got their first big gig by accident.

So you make all kinds of comments to the people standing around you. *Are you kidding me? Another Ramones cover? Isn't that like three already?* Or maybe it's more critical, more intellectual. You sit there and philosophize about the band's urgent need for another guitar player because modern listeners of music demand more layers of

texture in their songwriting. You think: *The keyboard player in leg warmers is derivative.* Of what you don't even know, but you've seen it all before. And you keep on going, thinking how, if you had a band, everyone would wear matching silver suits and you would do a song about the different flavors of ice cream that was 20 minutes long. So why? Why do we do this? Do we actually think we could do any better ourselves?

Yes. In all honesty, yes, we actually do.

And this, I think, is the essence of what we know as punk rock. The thought that we, even though we don't know what the fuck we're doing, could somehow do something that was some kind of improvement. It's what made an important movement out of some of the world's biggest jerk-offs and losers; it's what gives us each a sense that if we don't like what we're hearing or seeing, we can always shut the fuck up and try to do it ourselves.

...

I am a giant when I have drunk enough. When I get drunk, I like to make plans—big, crazy plans for shit I know will never happen. How about starting a Misfits cover band but do the songs all country and western? Not bad. Or a whole record of voice messages about breaking up set to a church organ? How about a musical dedicated to the life and times of Joe Strummer titled, "Strum on!" Not so good, but still, when I am drunk, in my most honest moments, I get ideas for things I am too scared to even try. Learning how to play the trumpet or getting on a skateboard again or volunteering to do creative writing with public school kids. Because when I sober up, I realize just how much work something like that would take, and I find other ways to convince myself I am too busy.

...

What is punk today, in 2004, is this: shutting up and trying to do some of these things. There is no end in sight to the number of amazing, inventive new bands, bands like 400 Blows or the Like Young or the Pulses, or the labels putting out this kind of selfless music, or the zines, documenting the various music scenes, now completely attacking the vain and lifeless void of corporate publishing. From self-published novels to films shot on shoestring budgets, this is what will live on, way past the simple songs, I hope. Because I have been hearing the same three chords, the same 1-2-

3-4 at the start of every riff, I have memorized the same snotty titles of records and their delivery at live shows where the singer is too drunk to finish and maybe that specific kind of punk has really been dead for a long while. But what really counts is what the idea of the thing causes you to do, beyond how you think. The strength of this music has always lain in its actions, the sound of making something happen this very moment, not in its far-flung intentions. Which is what brings me to continue to believe in the possibility of real change happening, beyond music and records, in the world as it continues to spin.

Perhaps things are within our power and what we are afraid of isn't that we can't make any fucking difference, but the terrifying responsibility that comes along with the realization that we can. We all have to do more than just hope. So I say this: happy birthday, Dan and *Punk Planet*. Thank you for showing us we can, indeed, do better ourselves.

I write to you, you write to me: joe@bailmag.com



As any menial laborer can tell you, there are certain games you have to play to keep yourself sane. You can create entire zoos full of paperclip animals,

you can make secret nap areas behind tool sheds, you can develop a love affair with huffing Dust-Off. One thing is certain, however. Without mental diversions, you're on the fast track to doom. You can either kiss your soul good-bye, check into the boobyhatch, or show up to work with a semiautomatic under your coat. Fortunately, I toil in an underground smut factory and there is no end to the engaging material I come across in a day's work. I am well acquainted with *Punk Planet's* literary rack mates and would like to share with you, tender readers, a glimpse into the state of non-mainstream magazines today.

High Times

Don't sign me up for any didgeridoo classes yet; I swear I'm not a hippie. Pot paraphernalia is tacky and belongs in a dorm room along with your Tracy Chapman CDs and MC Escher prints of "tripped-out ants goin' nowhere." If you find yourself in a situation where your housemate likes to keep their gigantic bong in the front room like a favorite chair, I would suggest you make lemonade out of lemons. Wrap a jacket around it and place a jaunty little cap on top to transform it into something a little more useful, like a scarecrow to shoo all the roaches. But my aversion to weed is further testament to the comedic virtue of *High Times*. It's hilarious! In the spirit of porn mags, they feature centerfolds. But instead of beaver shots, they have weed displays, tenderly spread out on a beach or cinched together with a ribbon and nestled inside of a silver goblet. *High Times* also features my all-time favorite ads, surpassing even the beloved sea monkey ads of my youth. You can mail-order expensive fake weed to psyche-out all your friends at school (oregano is passé). There is also THE WHIZZINATOR 5000 designed to help you pass your drug test. The kit includes a fake penis "available in black, brown, Latino, tan, or white", a four-ounce bag of clean pee, and a built-in heating pad! They even provide a pee sample! Whose job is that? Is it hard to get? Can I have it? My absolute favorite ad is one for phone sex. The captions above the phone numbers are hee-larious: "I'm a WHORE . . . who loves to toke," "Smoke it up with WILD horny co-eds who like to have fun," and "Get high and Get off with Nina." Just when I thought *High Times* couldn't get any funnier, they came out with the "GIRLS OF GANJA" issue. Each page features a different lovely lady bearing a moniker such as "Lady Budiva" and cradling a bouquet of weed. The captions underneath each photo echo a standard fashion catalog, with one key difference: "Strolling along the canals of Amsterdam with spliff in hand, Nicole plays the role of the well-bred stoner femme fatale—sophisticated, haughty, and very, very high," "Nicole needs some nugs to get baked by the lake. She wears a black mini-tube top and tri-string bottom, in hemp/cotton/Lycra." I may not be into weed, but in terms of comedy, move over *MAD*. This shit is aces.

Muscle Elegance

Muscle Elegance challenges my feminist convictions. Whenever I hear anyone making disparaging remarks about women's bodies, I am the first

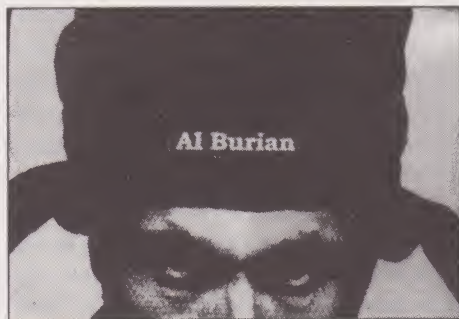
to pull on my Gloria Steinhem specs to deliver a smackdown. But, have you ever seen *Muscle Elegance*? It's a sort of jackrag featuring women bodybuilders in all their buff glory. Their bodies introduce a new spectrum of skin color into the world, ranging from fluorescent orange to glistening bronze. There is so much oil being spilled on these pages it would make Exxon weep. And there is . . . stuff . . . protruding from . . . "parts" . . . in an unusual fashion. I'm uncomfortable. Let's move on.

Splosh!

Splosh has long been my standby when I need to find a last-minute Christmas present for that special someone. This is a magazine for people who love women who love to make a mess. My favorite cover features a buxom lady sitting in a kiddie pool full of baked beans. She is shooting the unseen audience a come-hither stare while beans dribble unchecked down boob valley. And while items such as pudding and syrup seem to be a perennial favorite, they are not afraid to focus on nonfood related items as well, such as mud and paint. As long as it's sloppy. Would this be a food photographer's dream assignment or worst nightmare? How do you keep the beans from prematurely crusting under the hot lights? How can you keep the whipped cream looking fluffy after five hours in the sun? I want to know.

This is but a small sampling of the magazines found beyond the dentist's waiting room, but unfortunately, it's all I have time to review tonight. Thanks must also be extended to *Bust*, *Juxtapoz*, *Punk*, *The Believer*, *Heeb*, *Vice*, *Interview*, *Readymade*, *Giant Robot*, *Comic Art*, and *Banjee* (among others) for making every trip to the bathroom time well spent.

write to me! Janelle/PO Box 4047/ Berkeley, CA. 94704



Aging gracefully

As *Punk Planet* celebrates its 10th anniversary, I can't help but feel compelled to play the role of the icono-

clast once again, to go against the fanfare and champagne uncorkings, and point out all the typos. One wonders, as one looks over the decades' output, whether in fact there is any quality control going on at all. An example: record reviewer Scott Yahtzee writes in *Punk Planet* #45, "Hell yes, I'm picking an Iron Maiden album as my pick of the issue." Iron Maiden? Now, I understand that the definition of "punk" being championed by this magazine is a broad and culturally inclusive one, seeking to represent all manner of musical expression and ideological trope. Iron Maiden rules, they are the best band ever, but it's an incontestable fact that they are not a punk band. Iron Maiden is, in fact, almost the definitional blueprint of a *heavy metal* band. How did that slip by? Is *anyone* proofreading this magazine?

The punks have always been willing to lend Iron Maiden some punk attitude cred: first singer Paul D'Anno looked pretty punk, and second drummer Nicko McBrain was named Nicko McBrain. The reality of their surroundings seemed closer to the sort of British working class culture that produced the urban realism of the Clash or Sham 69 than to the hot tubs and limousines of Van Halen or the refurbished castles in which Led Zeppelin dwelt. Yahtzee goes so far as to give D'Anno credit for a punk musical approach: "his lyrics were often simple and sometimes inane, but they were close to the heart"—effectively positing D'Anno as having prefigured emo. The punks tend to be liberal in terms of choosing their bedfellows (I've noticed), but rest assured that your friends in the metal world don't feel so cozy vice versa. In fact, band visionary Steve Harris has always eschewed the blue collar working class angle in favor of an elitist virtuoso image, and the subject matter of the songs tended from the start to revolve around gothic fantasy and pompous historical epics with lyrics my professor's-son instincts tell me scream "plagiarized from the Encyclopedia Britannica." The anyone-can-do-it attitude was the opposite of what they were going for, and heart-on-the-sleeve D'Anno was out of the picture pretty quickly, to be replaced by singer Bruce Dickinson, a world-class fencer and obsessive Egyptologist. With the fruitcake factor now at maximum, the band was set to release a slew of genre-defining classics: *The Number of the Beast*, *Piece of Mind*, and *Powerslave*, the 1984 release of which marked the cultural crescendo of the new wave of British Heavy Metal, and saw the band on a two-year tour with an elaborate, mind-blowing arena show. This was Maiden at their pinnacle, and to claim otherwise is a scandalous act of music-journalistic scuttlebutt, an historical rewrite so that the haircuts jibe with the haircuts your particular subculture favors. "Hell yeah," them all you like, but it has always been Iron Maiden, in fact, who have explicitly and repeatedly rejected any connection to punk. If D'Anno was punk it was only in that he was average, in the fact that he, in the end, was just anyone, and that anyone, it turned out, couldn't do it.

Iron Maiden concert, Summer 2003: Bruce Dickinson is a charmingly non-confrontational front man, eschewing the standard method-acted metal character between songs (I had trouble suspending my disbelief during the opening bands' between-song woodland goblin routine). Occasionally he'll lapse into "Let me see your lighters!" or "Scream for me, Chicago!" but for the most part he is amiable and chatty, appearing comfortable onstage—sometimes even *too* comfortable. On the 1985 album *Live After Death* he introduces "the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" with, "and the moral of this story is, here's what not to do if a bird shits on you." The home video version is more unexpurgated, documenting a bizarre, tangent-strewn introduction to the song where he somehow manages to end up on the topic of Queen Elizabeth's use of marijuana to ease menstrual cramps. Long Beach arena screams its approval. One wonders what Dickinson's agenda is. Medicinal marijuana advocate? Feminist stance? Just babbling off the top of his head in front of 22,000 people? It's hard to tell. The

political agenda of the band has always been shrouded in obtuse statements such as this. Tonight at the Tweeter center is no different, as Dickinson encourages the crowd to illegally download the band's songs. "Fuck the major labels! This is our music!" he says, under the giant Miller Lite banner. The show is, in fact, jointly sponsored by Clear Channel and the Miller brewing company. "Not a prisoner/ I'm a free man," sings Dickinson, referencing not actual freedom but a British television program. A newer song, "The Clansman," is even more culturally incomprehensible: unfortunately titled for the US market, it is a historical drama about the Scottish feudal-familial system being destroyed by colonialism, and illustrates succinctly why Iron Maiden is a frustratingly resistant to interpretation. Anti-imperialist? Nationalist? Just an excuse to have a picture of Eddie in a kilt? "Freedom!" goes the chorus. "Everyone! Sing it!" says Dickinson, and they do. Freedom, who can't get behind that? But freedom for whom? The ancient Scots? The high school teacher in the pavilion selling six-dollar beer after work? The band's rebel posture is transparent, see-through. Looking around at the faces of the people standing semi-enraptured, lost in the moment between shifts at the dead end job, before returning home in Toyotas to the suburbs, I realize you can never turn back the clock, and this will never be as cool as it was at 13. The basic fact of the matter is, in 1984 on the World Slavery tour, Egyptian Pharaoh Eddie would split open to reveal flame-thrower-eyed mummy Eddie, towering and grimacing above the band—THAT was spectacle, that was escapist fantasy. 2003 Iron Maiden, touring in support of a 25th anniversary greatest hits repackaging (although they've had no new hits since their last greatest hits package) offers a lackluster Eddie, whose head pops open to reveal a psychedelic floating brain, and who then does an awkward mechanical shuffling shoulder-dance, the effect of which is to make the devilish grin appear embarrassed instead of menacing. The whole climactic event is notably non-pyrotechnical for the post-Great White era. No pyrotechnics, no puppetry: it is just not a spectacular enough spectacle. Still, the parking lot blares with cars pumping Maiden from their stereos after the show, tires screeching as people peel out, blasting whatever personal favorite the band neglected to include in the set tonight, satisfied customers in the thrall of their own instant nostalgia.



Tweakers vs. Shredders

Bred for destruction, the Aurora AS702MX shredder looks like an expensive German bread-

maker. A polite notice above the automatic intake alerts the user that it can eat "maximum 7 sheets paper only," as if this number was something to be ashamed of. Above this, there is a discrete slot for credit cards. The shreds drop into a metal basket with a soft

chime, like pine needles falling into underbrush.

The Aurora replaces my old Achiever PP5/2 "personal paper shredder," a more proletarian hardshell plastic thing that got me through some rough times in the 1990s. It was on this machine that I first inhaled the intoxicating scent of sliced paper, first felt the gratitude of destroying collection agency notices sent on behalf of a former therapist. Many failed short stories and bad column drafts and unspeakable lyrics were fed to this machine. Only in 2002, after eight years of faithful service, did the Achiever finally make a stuffed groan one night and die as it lived: destroying evidence. I placed the dead shredder on a high shelf in the closet (later to sit next to its understudy, a five-dollar Achieve knockoff that conked out on its maiden voyage). In a perfect world they would make a very large, very scary shredder for the sole purpose of shredding broken shredders.

The new AS702MX is a cross cutter, and this difference is important. Strip cut shredders slice in vertical lines, leaving tantalizing clues, like thousands of skinny jigsaw pieces. If one feeds a piece of paper the wrong way into a strip-cutter, entire sentences and phone numbers can survive its blades. The Iranians are still piecing together 25-year-old shredded documents fished out the US Embassy, slowly recovering state secrets. Cross cutters, in contrast, make two simultaneous cuts: horizontal and vertical. What fills the basket is confetti, as useful for ID thieves as an urn of ashes. I've come to understand the sheer joy of negation that drove Ollie North to jam his own shredders during Contragate.

But things have changed since Ollie's day. Meth has followed crack into the heartland. The future has arrived and it belongs to the tweakers. And where crack detracted, creating only more crack-heads, meth bestows its followers with powers of heightened concentration and patience. There is now a vast underworld composed of people who can sit comfortably for days or weeks sifting through bank statements and medical records and ATM receipts, temporarily several powers more observant than I am. Without the destructive capabilities of the Aurora I'd be lost. It is serious business. No crumb on the paper trail is too insignificant.

During a recent week's haul of incriminating evidence, for example, I shredded the following:

—An untouched and undated city of Pomona job application, question four ("Police officer applicants only, are you at least 20 years and 9 months of age?") reminding me that there was an afternoon a year ago when I had seriously considered applying to become a cop, the only city job available to someone without a college degree. I think I'd convinced myself I could do this job ironically, my sarcasm so thorough and so deeply penetrating as to be invisible to the other members of the training academy. No way is anyone else going to get their hands on this. *Shred.*

—Lyrics and mixing notes for an LP that never came out, ripe for blackmail in some way I can't quite decipher. *Shred.*

—A letter from a guy in Italy who got stiffed on a 7" my band was supposed to record years ago, highly incriminating. *Shred.*

—Forms from Apple One, the temp agency who got me a one-day paid gig last year, sitting in a room quietly, drinking coffee and staring at a telephone with a lumpy heart. What would someone on meth make of that afternoon? *Shred.*

—A fake, junk mail check from a mortgage company for \$46,209, which I fed the Aurora nervously, despite the large THIS IS NOT A CHECK imprint, hopefully not making a dreadful mistake. *Shred.*

—A pathetic tally of band shirts sold on tour four years ago (IN — 4, MI — 2, OH — jackpot! — 11) that made me appear uncharismatic and unelectable. *Shred.*

—A flyer from a New Years Eve 1997 concert after which I quit music forever, this bad memory coded in the artwork so as to be instantly accessible to anyone high on their own neurotransmitters. *Shred.*

—Two letters from bands to my defunct record label, already ceremoniously ripped in half so that their badly written PR became cryptic prose ("and methodically crushing all lesser / legions of fans from coast to / intense metal onslaught that will liquefy"). *Shred.*

—A scrap of paper that read FUCKING HILARIOUS in someone else's handwriting. *Shred.*

—A Hawaiian Airlines Visa Platinum "Acceptance Card," bearing a sexy silhouette of a hula dancer, that along with a flimsier plastic Household Bank silver MasterCard "Acceptance Card," seemed ready made for some speed-deranged seventh grader to use for a wild weeklong spending binge. And who picks up the tab? *Not me. Shred.*

—An accidental blank sheet of paper, even this somehow incriminating. *Shred.*

Halfway through, I hit the motherlode. A ripped scrap read "your PIN for cash access is 9155." Below this, I found the Federal Tax ID # of my old business and a notice from Domain Registry of America listing the exact day my website ownership expires. Worse still, just below this strata I found old diary notes from tours past kept in a scribbled shorthand that was meant to render the writing indecipherable to thieves and peekers. That's embarrassing, but it's all academic now. *Because I shredded that shit.*

Then there are the receipts. These are the worst; so tiny they must be delivered one by one into the gnashing gears, each a fragile window onto the core of my personality. There are many of them. I used to think I generated so many receipts on account of I don't wear a watch, and the best way to tell time in public is to check the printouts on the bottom of receipts. I understand now there is something a bit more pathological at work. Florida senator Bob Graham was ridiculed last year for keeping an obsessively detailed journal of his life, complete with all daily expenditures, no matter how mundane. I understand this journal now. It's addictive. I don't want to part with these mementos of transactions past, but what choice do I have? How would I be able to live with myself if other people knew that I ate something called a "lentil loaf" on

6/9/02? That, on 12/11/02, my business checking account stood at \$12.74? That, on 12/24/02 at 4:46 in a Publix food mart in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida I bought Twizzlers, a six-pack of Evian, two chocolate Yoo Hoos, a Florida map, a tube of Powerpuff Girls toothpaste, and something suspiciously labeled B SHOP MUESLI? That my cashier was named Denise? That the bottom of a Pizza Pirate receipt reads only AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH MATEY as it is fed into the jaws of death, erasing all proof that I purchased a particular pizza from a particular driver on a particular date, forever and ever and ever until the universe collapses in on itself?



*My body is a pastime
My mind is a simple joy
I learned my lesson
The hardest way
But you don't know me
But you don't know me
A complete inhuman
Complete inhuman
—Sonic Youth,
"Inhuman"*

Yesterday on NPR, Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* was interviewed about his series that ran in the Op-Ed section, on his travels into Cambodia to document and then free, by purchase, teenage sex slaves being kept in brothels in Poipet.

In the interview he talks about how he struggled with two things, one being that as a journalist, you are not supposed to involve yourself in the story—you are supposed to have distance, and that is the cynosure of the sort of reporting he is doing. He said to just leave this place, leave these young girls between 13-18 there to rot and die from AIDS—to just pop in, get his story, check his facts, hold their lives (or rather their lack of) and their plight up to the light for his own well-meaning ends—was not something he could do.

So, he purchased them.

And he says, secondly, that purchasing the slave-girls is not the best solution. It's not "the solution"—as it further feeds the slave economy—just as buying a lot of cocaine does not end the drug trade—but that just getting the two girls out and into new lives, real lives worth living, is better than bailing, blind-eyed and long-armed in the name of journalistic restraint and professional propriety.

Also, he asserts that the only way for this merchantry of girls to stop is for the lives of women and girls to be fully valued and fully accepted as important, equal, as human as men—worth educating, valued beyond the most basic purposes a woman/girl's body can be used for.

He says: "Some 700,000 people are trafficked around the world each year, many of them just girls. They form part of what will be the paramount moral challenge we face in this century: to address the brutality that is the lot of so many women in the developing world."

It's nice to see someone is taking things seriously.

Kristof's series works as an apt compassion/companion to Peter Landesman's 10,000 word, year-long investigative piece that ran in the *New York Times Magazine* around the same time about the 30–50,000 women and children that are trafficked into the US every year as sex slaves. Landesman's article is wrenching, difficult to read and when you Google search his name, the first things that come up are the answer-articles from *Slate* and the blogosphere doubting the extent to which sex slavery is really happening, which, as far as I am concerned, is a pathetic reaction at best.

Landesman's article is difficult because we are all implicated. We are all implicit in the invisible trespasses against humanity that is sex slavery/a profit economy of death rape—as silent Americans, as dumb Americans, as a capitalist economy goading the use of other human beings on every level. Landesman's critics' (Jack Shafer at *Slate*, editor/blog pundit Daniel Radosh) denial that a catastrophic stream of acts is happening, and happening here—in basements, in fancy condos, in my town and yours—is a denial of responsibility for whatever roles we play in other people being torn asunder in the world.

Under the guise of journalistic prudence, they transmogrify the sex slavery situation out of reality and up into the lofted heights of their set of standards, where they can use their tongs of language and distance and the guise of the academic pursuit of "truth" and "thorough analysis" to judge "appropriately." Because if they admit "yes" and grant credence to the stories of these women and children that Landesman tells, it is to admit that every minute of our lives—of our full, dulcet lives that are buoyed with love and music and therapy sessions and paychecks and freedom to waste our nights typing out savage essays on the stupid fucking Internet—is luxury.

And to be a successful American living the dream is to gorge oneself. It is to smack our lips with that ripe excess, and to willfully and casually waste what we have, to cast aside what we do not desire. That is, in America, what it is to be powerful.

"Women and children all over the world want men to die so that they can live. This is the most painful truth of male domination, that men wield patriarchal power in daily life in ways that are awesomely life threatening, that women and children cower in fear and various states of powerlessness, believing that the only way out of their suffering, their only hope is for men to die, for the patriarchal father not to come home." —bell hooks

Remebering Sarah

"I decided then that I wanted to make films in which women didn't get killed, raped or married—cool films about cool women."
—Sarah Jacobson

Sarah Jacobson died this week at age 32 from uterine cancer. Sarah was a filmmaker I had come to work with through her involvement with *Punk Planet* years ago. In recent years, she was responsible for bringing *Ladies and Gentlemen*, *the Faboulous Stains* into new light, viewing it with a doting, reclaimative eye. She directed two low/no-budget films, both iconic in the OG Riot Girl first wave: *I was a Teenage Serial Killer* and *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore*, and then for four years

took them, blusteringly, to every single festival, house screening, or show that would have her—in a station wagon. In the last few years she had done work for Oxygen and segments for VH-1 and was teaching. The last time I saw her, in 1999, she was sleeping on my couch during the summertime, in town for a film screening I think.

Recounting what Sarah did does not illuminate very well *how* she did it; how she went on in the world. She was a feminist tuff, unstoppable in her iron-marrowed desire to get her movies, her message into the world. Skilled, no-bullshit, she did not abide by anyone's ego or desire for decorum—Sarah was a woman's woman.

Sometimes, when people die, it's not a surprise, it's inevitable; it's part of their slow ascent into drug-addled abyss or dis-spirited ways. And while the loss is impactful and felt and makes a little slittery flit in your heart when you think their name or find their picture by accident or hear their song, you knew it was coming, you had started mourning their life, *you had a head start*. But when people who are very fiercely alive die, that is when it feels irreconcilable. Then the thought of them not being alive cannot be managed and just hangs there, waiting 'til you call it to truth.

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More: <http://tiny.abstractdynamics.org>

Listening to: Shannon Wright Over the Sun, *Muy Romantico Freak Storm LP*, 90 Day Men Panda Park, Fela, Gabba-pod, Catfish Haven demo.



My father was born on January 17, 1913, in the industrial town of Monongahela, Pennsylvania. Like many first and second generation

Irish immigrants, his father and uncle both worked in the steel mill.

One of their co-workers was an Italian guy called Joe Montana, and that's how my dad's cousin Margaret ended up becoming Mrs. Joe Montana and the grandmother of the greatest quarterback in the history of American football.

That was about as close as my father ever came to real fame or fortune. His life, which ended 91 years and seven days after it began, would seem uneventful and ordinary to most outside observers. But perhaps the lesson that comes from looking more closely at an "uneventful and ordinary" life is that there is no such thing.

My dad's life lasted into the 21st century, spanned most of the 20th century, and had deep roots in the 19th. His parents, his older brother, and nearly all of his relatives were born before 1900. His grandfather, who used to rock my dad on his lap, was born in 1832, fled to America as a 16-year-old to escape the Irish potato famine, and was a veteran of the American Civil War.

Civil War veterans were not at all unusual then, and neither were African-Americans—"colored people," as they were called at the time—who were the sons and daughters of slaves, or had themselves been born into slavery. The automobile was rapidly replacing the horse and buggy, but airplanes were still unusual enough that people ran outside to see them when they passed overhead.

There was no such thing as radio yet, and while some people had gramophones, most popular songs passed from house to house in the form of sheet music. Someone would figure out how to play the latest hit on the piano, and everyone else would sing along. Because of this method of transmission, songs had a considerably longer shelf life than they do today. Many of the pop songs that my father grew up singing had their origins in the 1890s, "the gay '90s," as they were called before "gay" took on a whole other meaning.

Dad was four years old when America entered what was variously known as "The Great War," "The World War," or, in an early triumph for PR and false advertising, "The war to end all wars." But he remembered being taken downtown to watch the brave young men march away to the accompaniment of brass bands and, two years later, seeing them march home again—victorious, yes, but in a far more somber mood, and minus the brass bands and the patriotic speeches.

Perhaps it was then—I don't know, because he never said—that my dad's lifelong aversion to war began. I never heard him express support for military action of any kind. He was viciously cynical about politicians and generals who spoke of heroism and sacrifice but never set foot on the battlefields where the young men died.

My father himself nearly died in 1918, a victim of the worldwide influenza epidemic that began as the war was ending and wound up killing more people than the war had. Perhaps because of that, and maybe also because he was the baby of the family, he might have been a little bit spoiled. His big sister once told me that, a couple years before she died, but who knows if it was really true? Maybe she was just jealous.

Spoiled or not, my dad had some good years during the 1920s. They were good years for a lot of Americans. Jobs were plentiful; the stock market was sky high. Having won the war, the USA was now indisputably the world's top dog, and as far as most people were concerned, that was as it should be. Wasn't America the most virtuous, the most decent, the most freedom-loving and heroic country in the history of the world? And what better way to celebrate than by getting fabulously rich?

Dad didn't fully buy into that myth, probably because he saw what had happened to his dad. Grandpa had only a second grade education and no formal training, but he had become very successful, especially once he'd moved to Michigan and gotten involved in the burgeoning automobile business. He'd even invented a new kind of shock absorber that was on the verge of being adopted by most of the major manufacturers, and had set up his own company to market it.

My father was 16 that year, and celebrated by taking a trip to San Francisco. He and his friend hitchhiked, hopped trains across the country, and slept under the stars in Union Square. On the way back, when they'd run low on money, a friendly sheriff in Montana let them spend the night in one of his unoccupied jail cells.

It was one of the last truly carefree times Dad would know. That October the stock market crashed and ushered in the Great Depression. Grandpa lost his business and all his money, and my father lost his own savings—money that might have gone toward college or toward his first car, or a down payment on a house—when the banks failed.

Grandpa's confidence and nerves were shattered by his sudden bankruptcy, and he was never able to work again. So when my dad graduated high school in 1931, at the depths of the Depression, there was no question of going to college, or heading off to see the world. All that mattered was finding some kind of work, and bringing in enough money to keep his family going.

It was probably during those years that my dad's political opinions solidified. Labor unions were struggling to organize the workers, and the bosses fought back, sometimes with fatal consequences. Although Franklin Roosevelt had introduced some much-needed reforms and relief programs, they didn't go nearly far enough in my dad's mind, and he switched his allegiance to the Socialists.

Things finally eased up a bit in the mid to late '30s, and my dad was able, briefly, to pursue one of his long-standing dreams, that of becoming an artist. He enrolled in the Chicago Institute of Art, and adopted a rakish style that made him look a bit like a film star. He met my mother, but before they could get married or even seriously pursue their romance, World War II loomed on the horizon. Now the fun and games were truly over.

Much as my father loathed war, there was little he could do to avoid being caught up in this one. Once America had been attacked, there was virtually no sympathy for shirkers or draft dodgers. All but a handful of countries were involved in the war in one way or another, so running away was not a realistic option, and even if it were, it was hard to imagine ever being able to come home again.

So at age 29 my father made what must have been the fairly shocking transition from art school to military service. He hated regimentation and following orders and bullies, all of which abounded in the Army. Because of his artistic talent, he was placed in a special battalion of the Army Corps of Engineers, whose job it was to create camouflage and diversionary installations that would draw the enemy's attention away from the real thing.

When I was a child, nearly every kid's father had been in the War, and kids being the way they are, nearly every kid's father had been a hero, fighting off hundreds of Germans with his bare hands and single-handedly conquering whole Pacific islands. Naturally I pressed my father for tales of his own heroism that I could recount to the other boys. After all, I didn't want them thinking my dad was a sissy. It was bad enough that he didn't go hunting like the other men, never swore or smoked, and seldom drank.

But I could never get a word out of him, apart from the acknowledgment that, yes, he had carried a gun, and no, as far as he knew he hadn't shot any Germans. To hear him tell it, he'd spent the entire war far removed from the battlefield, painting camouflage and learning to speak French. It was only when he was in his late 80s that I got him to tell me what it was really like.

I heard a hair-raising tale of driving down the banks of the

Rhine on moonless nights while coming under constant artillery fire from the other side. He told how the young man in the driver's seat—the place usually occupied by my father—had been blown to bits by an incoming shell, and how the survivors had to grab their gear and pile into the truck behind and continue down the river with shells bursting all around them.

What were they carrying in the trucks? Ammunition, tons of it. If the shell had hit a few feet to the rear, they all would have been incinerated instead of just the driver. That was a typical night's work for my dad during the war. I pressed him for more details, but his eyes glazed over from what looked like a combination of memory and fear. This was when his mind was beginning to go, and it was hard to get him to concentrate on something for more than 10 minutes or so.

"Dad," I said, "that's an amazing story. You must have been absolutely terrified." He nodded his agreement, which was about as close to an overt expression of emotion that I ever saw from him.

"But why," I continued, "didn't you ever tell any of us about it before? Even Mom had no idea what it was like for you during the war."

His eyes were clear again, and he said in that matter-of-fact Midwestern accent, "I never liked hearing soldiers talking about their battlefield exploits. It always comes off too much like bragging."

That was one of the last times I was able to talk with him in any detail about the war, or, for that matter, his life. He began a long decline, both mentally and physically, and when he finally died there was almost nothing left of the man. Death seemed like a blessed relief for everyone involved, himself most of all.

There was one thing—well, a lot of things, really, but one thing in particular—that I was never able to ask him about again. He and my mother married immediately after the war, but it was another two years before their first child, that would be me, was born. As a returning veteran, he was entitled to a free college education, but he never took up the offer. Nor did he try to resurrect his career as an artist.

Instead he went to work in the Detroit Post Office, a job he would hold until his retirement in 1975, and it was on the meager salary he earned there that he supported my mother and four children. He often used himself as an example of what not to do: a frequent refrain in our house was, "If you don't study hard you're liable to end up working at the Post Office like me."

But I knew—because he'd let it slip in an unguarded moment—that before going to work at the Post Office, he had been offered a job as a commercial artist. It wasn't anything glamorous—in fact it involved the thoroughly prosaic task of designing milk bottle caps—but it was a start. And he was seriously talented; I'd seen his drawings and paintings.

So why, I demanded with all my childish earnestness, hadn't he taken the chance to work as an artist instead of whiling away his life in a job he clearly hated? "I figured that with kids on the way, I couldn't afford to take chances. Art's just not reliable enough. I needed to bring in a steady paycheck."

As a child I found this profoundly disillusioning. I fantasized about having a real live artist for a dad, maybe with a beret and mustache. Perhaps we could have lived in Paris. I loudly proclaimed that I'd rather starve as an artist's son than live in comfort

as the son of a postal worker.

As an adult my viewpoint moderated, but as I say, I never had a chance to talk with him about it again. Even when his mind was still sound, he was a master of changing the subject, of evading issues, of trailing off into an indefinable vagueness. When he died, and I was preparing to give a eulogy at his funeral, I had to try and answer the question myself.

Was he a hero or a coward? A victim of circumstance and timing who did the best he could with what life offered him, or a man who let fear and reticence hold him back from living life to the fullest? An uncomplaining stoic who devoted himself to caring for others, or someone content to live a life of quiet desperation, unwilling or unable to fully care for himself?

All of the above probably applied to him in some measure, and if I ever doubt that I am my father's son, I need only note that all of the above applies equally well to me. If there's regret in my life today, it's not that my father has died, it's that I never knew or cherished him as much as I could when he was alive. We weren't close, unfortunately, and while I spent most of my younger years blaming him for that, I'm old enough and mature enough to acknowledge that much of the responsibility is my own as well.

As I prepared to walk to the front of the church and talk about my father's life, fully expecting him to stick his head out from a cloud and interrupt me if I got any facts or opinions wrong, I looked around at the three generations of our family gathered there and recalled how we had all pulled together, putting aside our usual squabbles, to make this day a good one, to honor his memory and celebrate his life.

No, he wasn't a famous man, or a rich man. If you weren't connected to him by blood or friendship, you'd have little reason to be interested in what was ultimately a very ordinary life. He had faults as well as virtues, and even those who loved him most were sometimes driven mad by his quirks and foibles.

But there was a quiet decency about him, a sense of duty and honor and loyalty and respect that too often these days seems hopelessly old-fashioned, but without which no family, let alone society, could function. As a child I felt hard done by because I didn't have an extraordinary superhero for a Dad, but today I'm aware that millions of people would be enormously grateful to have a profoundly ordinary Dad like mine.

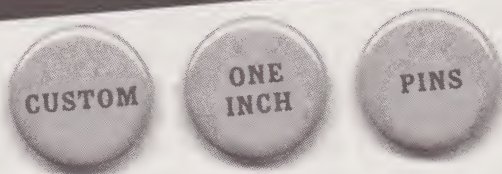
Is there a moral to all this? You knew there would be. As I told the people assembled in church, those of you who still have intact families, or fragments of families, or even just a surviving relative or two: talk to them.

Don't wait until they're fading away and you have to piece together bits of memories and illusions to form some semblance of truth and history. Even if you think you don't get along, even if you really don't get along, talk to them. Find out everything you can about your family and your loved ones, and let them know everything you can about yourself, because it's the surest, perhaps the only way that you will truly come to know yourself.

P.S. Rest in peace, Dad, and thanks for everything. ©



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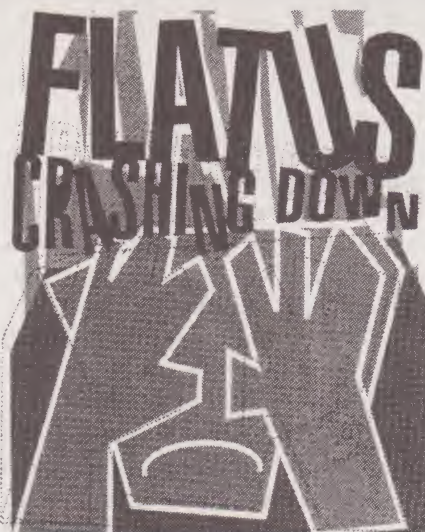
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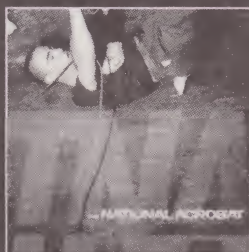
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Adult Children of Academics: Athena

by Leah Ryan

It's not like it was painful for me to go to the damn bookstore. I go there all the time anyway. It's the kind of bookstore you really have to go to once a week. It's a mess and it's hard to find things. They get new stuff in and it sits in piles and gathers dust. Plus if you want to get anything good out of the dollar bin you have to get there early or there will be nothing left except self-help and romances. Neither of which interest me. Self-help is a crock and, come to think of it, so is romance.

So yeah, I went to the bookstore a lot anyway so it's not like I was going out of my way. It's only a 15-minute walk from my house. Sometimes I go there after work, too.

At first, I assumed he was an intellectual snob. That's because he never smiled. Something you'll notice about intellectual snobs: They don't smile and they don't think anything is funny. The only things they laugh at are weird obscure jokes related to some useless scientific or historical fact that nobody else knows except their snob friends. And of course they laugh at other people's inferior intelligence. I always figure they laugh at me after I leave the store with my purchases. I figure they chuckle and say things like, "Look, this one bought Tolstoy and Tama Janowitz. Who does she think she's kidding?"

In actuality, they probably don't say anything at all, which may be worse.

I spent my whole life with people like that. My dad was a professor of philosophy. I say "was" which is funny since he's not actually dead. I guess that should tell you something right there. When I was a kid I'd sit on the living room floor and look up and I'd see them all swirling the ice around in their highball glasses, my father and his friends, having some kind of totally impenetrable discussion while my mother ran back and forth to the kitchen with the scotch bottle and the cocktail weenies and what have you.

My name says it all. Athena. We're not Greek.

I was an only child, which may have something to do with the fact that my parents hated each other too much to have sex. This was the '70s. There were no alternative methods. I picture them having a hideously civilized discussion about having more children. "Er, yes, uh, I think the time is most opportune, er, uh . . ." and then going to the bedroom and looking at each other and going "Naw."

I say "the bedroom" but I mean it as a euphemism. For as long as I can remember, they had separate rooms. My father's room was called "the study," but there was a bed in it and that's where he slept. Fortunately, he was able to have plenty of sex because he got a new crop of students every year and there was always at least one who was stupid enough to sleep with him.

So the upshot is that I'm well versed on the subject of snobs. Of course they blame me for my lack of academic success, but really it's their fault. I'd go to school and no matter what was happening, no matter what the teacher was saying, it seemed like a pointless waste of time. They'd be talking about pre-Columbian exploration or algebra or the Declaration of Independence or whatever, and my head would just be filled with this loud buzzing like a swarm of bees. I'd just keep my eyes on the clock all day. The whole act of pursuing knowledge for the sake of proving something to someone just bugged the hell out of me. I couldn't wait until I was 16 and I could drop out.

Do you think my father enjoys telling people that his only child is a high school dropout who works as an assistant administrative assistant at an executive search firm? No, I very much doubt that he does. I file. I fax. I answer phones. I wear cheap polyester suits. I know it just kills him. Meanwhile, when I applied for the job they said I needed a college degree and I told them I'd gone to Columbia and that I was on the Dean's list every semester. They bought it hook, line, and sinker.

What he doesn't know is that I go home and change into my sweats and I read. I read everything I can get my hands on. The difference is I don't brag about it. I don't do it to impress anybody.

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So anyway, about this guy at the bookstore. Since he never smiled, I figured he was one of them, even though he didn't really fit the profile. He never ran the register. The snobs are always on the register and their snob friends hang around for hours.

But all he did was stock. He's little, and I've seen him carry around what looks like 50 books without dropping any. He's incredibly focused. And he always knows exactly where things go. He doesn't stop and sigh and look around like the other stock people do. After he sets a pile of books down, he doesn't crack his knuckles or wipe his hands on his pants. He's like an Olympic athlete. Or a wild animal, blending with his environment.

He kind of looked like he belonged on a shelf with the books. Not only was he perfectly compact, but his skin had the color of the pages of an old paperback. Kind of beige. Not tan, like he'd been in the sun. Beige, and dusty-looking.

I also never heard him speak. As you well know, an intellectual snob always has something to say. Something they're confident will enlighten the entire universe.

The first time I saw him smile, it shocked me. I mean really shocked. Like I stood there with my mouth open. He was arranging books on a table and this woman was looking at books on the table next to it. She was one of these really well-groomed counter-culture types. The type that has green hair but waxes her eyebrows. This one had red hair but you know what I mean. Anyway, she kind of

bumped into him with her butt. It's pretty much impossible not to bump into people at that store because it's so cramped and there are piles of books all over the floor. So she bumps into him with her butt and he turns around and she says, "Oh, sorry." That was it. Just like that—"Oh, sorry."

He broke into the biggest smile I have ever seen in my entire life. It just lit up his whole face. It lit up the whole store. He smiled and he said, "That's OK."

Like I said, I just stood there and stared. It was enough to make me want to run over there and bump into him myself. But it was too soon. Too obvious. I had two books in my hand that I was thinking about buying. One was a really nice vintage paperback edition of *White Fang*. The other was a weird old book from the dollar bin called *Come and Git It* about cowboys and what they ate out on the range. Of course both of these books seemed stupid to me at that moment, but I had to buy them, because if I didn't, I'd have to put them back where I got them and that was just too complicated. He hadn't caught me staring at him, which was good, but I wasn't sure I could act right around him anymore.

I pretty much ran to the snob checkout so I could get out of there. The snob looked at the titles as he rang them up but his face didn't register anything, so to speak. I think the snobs work pretty hard at that blank look they have.

My total was \$3.21. I was sure I had

exact change but I didn't want to deal with it. I gave the snob a crisp \$20.

It was getting dark outside. I'd been in the bookstore for a good hour and 15 minutes. Now that my heart wasn't beating a mile a minute, I felt really tired. One time I got stung by a bee (I'm allergic) and at the hospital they shot me up with adrenaline. Adrenaline makes you feel really cold and nervous. After it wore off I was so tired I slept for about 16 hours straight. Any kind of excitement, fear, what have you, wears me out and makes me want to take a nap. It was only six o'clock but still I went right home.

On Saturdays there's nothing on TV but sports and infomercials. I turned the TV on but I wasn't really watching it. I do that a lot. I put the volume on low. I lay down on my bed and opened up the cowboy book. I read a little bit about the equipment the cowboy cook carried on his wagon, and how it was really hard to keep animals and bugs out of the provisions. It was interesting, but I drifted off. Before I fell asleep altogether I wondered about what was going to happen the next time I went into the bookstore. Was I going to do something stupid and act like an idiot? Was it worth the risk? Where would I get my books now? What if he really actually was an intellectual snob? On TV they were selling a product that was supposed to tighten your abs. It was a belt that you wore while doing normal daily activities. The thing that struck me as funny was that none of those activities looked normal to me. ©

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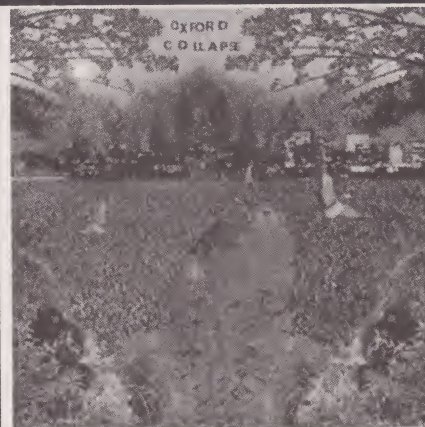
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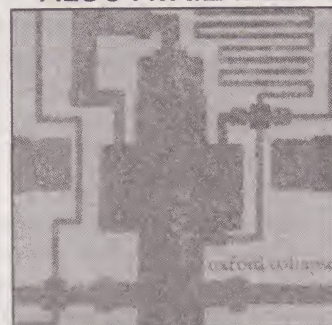
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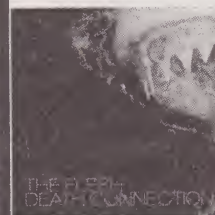
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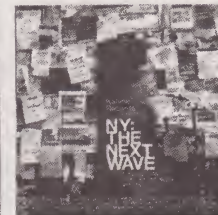
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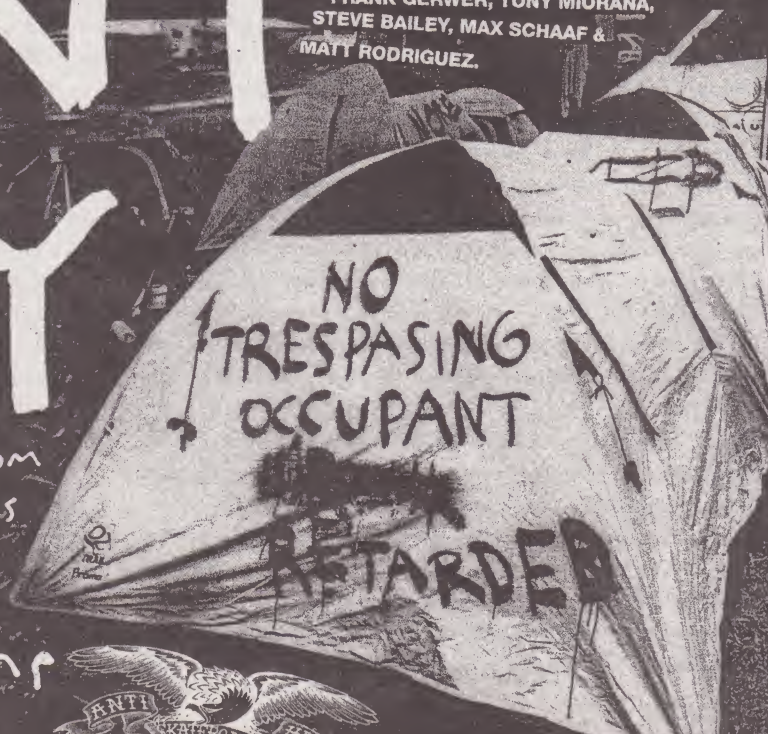
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Booking and promoting your own tour

By Mollie Wells

The concept of touring—that romantic notion of life on the road, in the van, on the stage—is almost always perceived to be in stark contrast to the actual practice of self-booking and self-promoting a tour. Where touring is *art*, booking is *business*. Where touring is late-night laugh-riot conversations, booking is screaming “Yes!” and “No!” and “That won’t work!” into a cell phone while dashing from office to office. Bands often assume that the sort of knowledge required to get the shows and get people to the shows is far more than they possess. It’s not uncommon for bands to assume that they absolutely *must* have a booking agent and a publicist before even thinking about planning a successful tour. But that just isn’t the truth.

While booking agents and publicists can be wonderful wells of resources for getting the job done, it’s entirely possible (though not always easy) to *do it yourself*. This quick-flip guide to booking and promoting a tour—while not totally inclusive or at all definitive—will get you well on your way to the road. You just need a little gusto and a whole lot of patience.

Start Early

Quite a few things have to be taken care of in the process of booking a tour, and waiting until the very last minute is a surefire way to make sure that *none* of them get done. All press outlets and most venues have lead times: the amount of time before the requested show date or press write-up in which all correspondence (like press kits) must be received. Evange Livanos, an agent for Philadelphia’s Fata Booking, starts booking procedures for her “baby bands” at least three months in advance of the first date. She does, however, stray from that formula at times. “Sometimes it’s easier as a baby band to wait,” she says, “because you can get added to existing shows that will have a built-in fan base.” Venues do tend to have an inherent flexibility, but remember—just because you ask to be put on an already set show doesn’t mean you will.

Lead times for magazines and newspapers are much more rigid. They do, after all, have set issue release dates and must have stories to fill those issues—whether it’s your story or not. Peter Bottomly, of Skyscraper Media, recommends sending press mailings to alternative weeklies (such as Village Voice or LA Weekly) at least four to five weeks in advance of the tour; this allows for a one-week transit period, several days for the writer or editor to read and listen to the material, and two weeks for you to get the writer or editor to assign a story. “Any less of a lead time will probably be too late to get coverage,” Bottomly says. “They may have already assigned other stories or you’ve missed their deadline.” Lead times from publication to publication will

vary; if you aren’t sure when to send something, e-mail the appropriate editor.

Build an Up-To-Par Press Kit

Press kits are tricky little things. They can include tons of different items and often have to be tailored to individual recipients. For the purposes of planning a tour, you’ll need two different versions of a press kit: one for venues and one for publications.

Venues are generally more interested in hearing you than reading about you, so a venue press kit can be extremely simple; usually, a short bio and a CD will do. “I hate long, elaborate press kits,” Livanos says. “I want to know what it is about the band that makes them special, and I want to know what label they’re on, and most importantly, I want to hear them.” She adds that it’s a good thing to have mp3’s on hand, as well—some venues prefer them to CD’s. Just make sure you know the venue’s preference before sending anything.

Your press kit for publications will be slightly more involved. Bottomly recommends including a well-written bio containing all pertinent information, any important press clippings (such as reviews or write-ups in other publications) and, of course, a CD. “Probably the most important part of the press kit is the CD itself,” Bottomly says. “At all costs, avoid sending advances to newspapers.” If you absolutely *must* send an advance or a CD-R, Bottomly says, put it in a full jewel case with a spine—this allows the writer or editor to find it in a stack of others.

Also, Bottomly says, it’s absolutely crucial to include your tour dates in the press kit. “If a paper in [another city] receives a package and they don’t relate to it as a band playing locally, they might toss it in a separate pile and forget about it,” he says. A very short cover letter notifying the writer or editor of an upcoming tour can also save your kit from being overlooked.

And, above everything else, make sure that your contact info is on every single piece of your press kit. If they get separated, lots of club owners and editors won’t take the time to try to put the pieces back with their appropriate counterparts—they’ll just chuck the whole thing.

Fill Your Rolodex

Finding proper contacts can be a daunting task, but it’s much less monumental than you might believe. In fact, it’s often as easy as logging into Google. With the right keywords (try “indie” or “DIY” in relation to the city you’re searching for), you’ll be able to come up with an amazing amount of results. And don’t discount websites such as Live Journal or Friendster; though it may seem silly, such

community-based websites are often breeding grounds for promoters and show spaces. A carefully placed bulletin post can lead you to several promoters willing to help out. Livanos recommends contacting local bands as well—they can fill you in on the best show spaces and might even be willing to put you on one of their shows.

Finding local press sources is considerably easier. JournalismJobs.com and the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies keep comprehensive lists of alternative weeklies and their websites, where you can almost always find contact information for the paper's music editor. Bottomly advises to not overlook daily newspapers, either—"a surprising number of daily papers are receptive to indie music," he says. Just be sure that your press kit is going to the right person—if you can't find information for a music or arts & entertainment editor, e-mail a managing editor for the appropriate person's contact information. A press kit in the wrong hands is the same as no press kit at all.

Wait, Wait and Wait Some More

Once you've sent your press kits, be prepared to sit in front of the computer or next to the phone desperately waiting for replies. Promoters and editors are busy people, and they frequently take their sweet time responding—often up to two weeks. Don't take this to be an inherently bad sign, and *do not* start hounding them! Livanos recommends following up with a promoter after two weeks but no more than two times. "After that, move on," she says. "They obviously have nothing for you and are too busy to respond. Sounds bad, I know, but your efforts would be better spent looking for another club than hounding one that will not or can not help you."

You can give editors a little less time, according to Bottomly. He advises waiting seven to 10 days before contacting them, first with an e-mail, then a phone call if they don't respond. After that, he says, don't attempt to reach them more than a few times in a three week span. "If they're not responding after the third time, they probably aren't interested and aren't taking the time to tell you," he says. He adds that a "natural approach" is the best way to deal with editors. "If they seem interested, keep on them," he says. "If they don't seem interested, just make sure they got the press kit and know about the show. If they want to run something, they'll let you know."

Ask and Ye Might, Maybe, Possibly Receive

If a promoter or editor shows interest in booking a show or writing an article, it's up to you to see if the ante can't be upped a bit. It very rarely hurts to ask if that show preview can be turned into an interview or if that venue can offer a food buy-out or, better yet, a guarantee. But don't be upset if and when the request is turned down.

"Don't expect food buyouts or amenities if you are a brand new band," Livanos says, "you will be disappointed." She adds that DIY spaces and promoters are often more prone to offer free food than larger spaces. "Most smaller promoters, like the DIY kids, usually treat my baby bands better than my clubs do," she says. "They are usually *stoked* that they have a chance to work with a touring band and they treat them very well."

Bottomly recommends fully judging the writer's or editor's interest before pitching a large article. If they seem very interested, he says, that's the time to see if they'll run something bigger. "But don't be too pushy," he says. "They get so much stuff and have limited space, so if they're offering up any coverage, that should be satisfactory." If the topic, however, is approached with respect and decorum, often the worst a promoter or editor will do is say no. You'll never know if you don't ask.

Remember: Patience is a Virtue

There is no task more arduous and frustrating than booking and promoting your own band's tour. You will hear lots of no's and I-really-can't-help-you's. You will hear lots of silence, in the form of unresponsive editors and promoters. You will spend hours, days, rerouting your tour because two shows decided to fall through at the last minute. Be prepared for hurdles—it's an occupational hazard. But if you can keep your heart rate down long enough, you'll see that what emerges from the wreckage: your very own tour wrapped up in mountains of self-accomplishment, is worth every heart-stopping minute spent on the phone.

"Self-booking a tour can be very frustrating," Livanos says. "However, I feel it gives a band drive. Just make sure you give yourself enough time to plan it out. Be patient and hang in there." ©

DIY SEX EARLY TO BED

by sex lady searah

Dear Sex Lady,

I've been experiencing some very mild spotting lately. Often it happens after a strong orgasm. I'm using enough lube and nothing hurts, so I don't think it's a simple abrasion; I don't appear to have an infection of any kind, either. Sometimes I get a little bit of cramping below my belly button to go along with this.

I'm a fat girl, if that makes any difference. I know it can affect hormone levels. I'm not on any hormonal birth control; I use condoms. Oh, and I'm definitely not pregnant. Any idea what might be going on? Should I be worried? Should I see a doctor? I don't have insurance. —Amy

Dear Amy,

Get thee to a doctor! Pain is *bad* and you should *always* talk to a medical professional when you have pain that you can't explain. Yes, us big girls can have funky hormone stuff that leads to irregular periods and spotting at weird times, and if there was no pain, I wouldn't worry so much about the spotting. Some people just naturally spot at times; you can also spot if you are pregnant, or if you had really rough sex and maybe got a little cut in your vagina or something. However, what you are describing sounds like it could possibly be Endometriosis (see below), but of course, only a doctor can tell you that for sure. I know the whole no-insurance thing sucks balls, but most cities of any size have some sort of health care clinic for women and these usually operate on a sliding scale basis. You can always call your local Planned Parenthood as well and they should be able to help you in some way or another. But don't wait! At the very least a doctor can tell you what is wrong and will treat it or put your mind at ease that there is nothing wrong.

What is Endometriosis? (from endometriosisassn.org)

Endometriosis is a painful, chronic disease that affects millions of women. It occurs when tissue like that which lines the uterus is found outside the uterus, usually in the abdomen on the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and ligaments that support the uterus; the area between the vagina and rectum; the outer surface of the uterus; and the lining of the pelvic cavity.

This misplaced tissue develops into growths or lesions, which respond to the menstrual cycle in the same way that the tissue of the uterine lining does: each month the tissue builds up, breaks down, and sheds. Menstrual blood flows from the uterus and out of the body through the vagina, but the blood and tissue shed from endometrial growths has no way of leaving the body. This results in internal bleeding, breakdown of the blood and tissue from the lesions, and inflammation and can cause pain, infertility, scar tissue formation, adhesions, and bowel problems.

Symptoms of endometriosis

A common symptom of endometriosis is pain, mostly in the abdomen, lower back, and pelvic areas. The amount of pain a woman feels is not linked to how much endometriosis she has. Some women have no pain even though their disease affects large areas, or there is scarring. Some women, on the other hand, have severe pain even though they have only a few small areas of endometriosis. General symptoms of endometriosis can include (but are not limited to):

- Extremely painful (or disabling) menstrual cramps; pain may get worse over time
- Chronic pelvic pain (includes lower back pain and pelvic pain)
- Pain during or after sex
- Intestinal pain
- Painful bowel movements or painful urination during menstrual periods
- Heavy menstrual periods
- Premenstrual spotting or bleeding between periods

Dear Sex Lady,

Ok, so, I like porn, I've seen some sexy scenes in porn movies that have gotten me all hot and horny, but so many of the movies are degrading and/or stupid (not to mention how unrealistic the actors can look). Are there any good porn movies out there that I can maybe even watch with my girlfriend? —Wannabe Porn Freak

Dear WPF,

Believe it or not, I get this question *all* the time at my shop. There are a lot of people who want to watch something sexy that goes further than *9 1/2 weeks* but isn't as icky as most of the porn out there. The good news is, in the past decade or so a lot more "good" porn is being made and is widely available! I put good in quotes because honestly, even the best porn usually suffers from bad acting, super contrived story lines, awful music or terrible film quality. We're used to Hollywood movies and I have yet to see a pornographic film that rivals the quality of any "real" movie. That said, if you are willing to overlook unfortunate wardrobe choices and absurd dialogue, you can find some good movies out there. Keep your remote handy though because even the best porn can drag at times and sometimes watching people fuck in fast forward is more fun!

Now about sharing with your partner. Lots of couples enjoy watching dirty movies together, but don't force the issue with your girlfriend. Porn really crosses a line for some people and even the gentlest, non-degrading flick can offend, so know your audience before you pop it in the VCR. Some surprises can backfire!

Sex Lady's Top 5 Dirty Movies

Bridal Shower

Directed by Candida Royalle

Candida Royalle used to be a porn actor until she switched it up and started directing films in the '80s. She pioneered the whole idea that porn could be made with a woman's sensibilities (something more directors should do) and she continues to make hot, explicit porn that doesn't make you gag (I gag easily). There are no women's faces covered in cum or two guys sticking their cocks in the same woman at the same time (which, have you noticed, they always somehow manage to do without touching *each other*). The story lines are pretty silly and most of the actors are "regular" porn stars, but the sex is great and there is often excellent chemistry between partners. This one is one of my favorites of hers because it stars Nina Hartley, who is a porn goddess. She is super-charming and very genuine (even with her fake boobs) and I almost got to meet her last year at an industry convention, but I chickened out. She has been in probably hundreds of movies and has a whole series of sex how to's that she directs. You must check her out. Oh and this here is straight porn. While some of Candida's films have a little girl on girl action, they are still very heterosexually oriented.

Urban Friction

Directed by Marianna Beck & Jack Hafferkamp

Made by a Chicago couple who used to run a smart erotic magazine called *Libido*, this is a porn for those of us who like the big city and are tired of seeing porn stars with blond hair and fake tits. The cute main chick in this film has dark hair and a real body. She gets it on with her boyfriend, herself, and her cute friend in a bathtub. She then gets to be in a Boy-Girl-Boy sandwich. Yum!

Slide Bi Me

Directed by Felice Amador

This movie cracks me up. It is one of the most fun porns I've seen. If you are looking for a movie that is less straight than your typical adult movie, this is a rare gem. At a company picnic gone horribly wrong, the girls are doing the girls, guys are doing guys, girls are doing guys (strap on style), and the guys are doing the girls. There is really something for almost everyone. The actors have natural bodies, great senses of humor and a hell of a great time (or so it seems). Be warned though, there is a Jell-O scene and the editing is a little "artistic".

Bend Over Boyfriend

Directed by Shar Rednour & Jackie Strano

This is technically an instructional video, meaning the fucking is intercut with lessons about anal sex, the kind where a

woman does her guy up the ass, which you really don't see in mainstream porn. However, more and more heterosexual couples are discovering the joys of pegging (as Dan Savage calls it) and this movie is great for the instruction as well as the inspiration. The cast is made up of regular looking people (well, San Francisco regular) who really seem to be enjoying the action. The only disturbing part, for me, was that one guy left his shirt on the whole time and I am not a big fan of the whole T-shirt/no pants look.

Turn Me Up, Over, & On

Directed by Carloyn Caizzi

If you have only seen mainstream porn with lesbian sex, then you haven't seen lesbian sex. What passes for lesbian sex in porn is some straight guy's fantasy about what big-breasted women do to each other when men aren't conveniently located. This here is some real, honest-to-god dyke porn, made by an honest-to-god dyke, made especially for other dykes. Without the hassle of a cumbersome story line, this black and white beauty gets right to the hot, passionate lesbo sex and the actors are regular, cute dykes who you can tell actually like each other—how revolutionary! Plus I know the director personally so you for sure have to check this film out!

All these movies (and more) can be purchased at my shop (early2bed.com) or at your local feminist sex shop, should you have one in your town. You can also rent them online at bluedoor.com. Now go out and watch some smut! ©

E-mail me at diysex@punkplanet.com. My shop, *Early to Bed*, is at 5232 N. Sheridan in Chicago. We're online at www.early2bed.com.

DIY food EVERYTHING THAT

BUILDING YOUR OWN EARTH OVEN

In cooking, rarely do we think about the actual appliances we use to make food. We usually have some form of refrigeration, water, and fuel in a housed kitchen. We pay our utility bills to keep them running. But what if we didn't have that option? What if you wanted to cut down on your use of gas to reduce your effect on the non-renewable natural resources of the world? There is a whole world of sustainable living options out there—everything from photovoltaic roofs to a simple mud oven. Since we're talking food, the mud oven is a perfect entry into the world of sustainable living.

The mud oven, or earth oven, is essentially an adobe structure that is built outdoors to accommodate baking. The best part about the oven is that it's not just about baking bread (I can't carry that topic into a third column!). You can bake just about anything in the oven, even cookies. A really simple oven can be placed on some sawhorses and built in just a day. The following is the basic step process.

To begin

The first thing you need to do is assess what kind of baking you'll do in the oven. For instance, if you think you'll try to bake some cookies, remember to gauge the oven floor around a typical baking sheet size. This helps determine the amount of materials necessary for oven construction and the amount of ground space you'll need.

An oven shouldn't sit directly on the ground. The fire will need a separation from floor to ground. An advanced oven would be built on the ground with enough stone underneath to separate heat from ground and also to raise the oven to a manageable level. A lower oven is usually harder on your back and the food going in and out of the oven. The more basic oven sits above-ground on the platform, though it does need a layer of insulation between oven and board, which is covered in the "securing the floor" section.

Materials needed

Hopefully you can find some scrap materials in the neighborhood. For this project you'll need two sawhorses or some kind of structure to hold a sheet of plywood, which will hold the oven; some red or fire bricks for the oven floor; sand; a shovel; some type of transport device—wheelbarrow or buckets; a plastic tarp; insulation (pumice stones); and lumber scraps. Construction sites often have some scrap lumber and bricks in their dumpsters and often sand on the site.

Initial set-up

Set-up the oven's base by placing the wood on the sawhorses (instead of sawhorses, you can also use cement blocks or any other solid structure you can locate that will hold the weight of the oven). The surface holding the oven also needs to be pretty hefty to manage the weight.

Securing the floor

The floor construction is the form around which the oven will be built. First, since heat will conduct through floor bricks into the

base, insulation is necessary. If this oven was built on the ground, any type of rubble could be placed first. Since this oven sits on a plank, it should first be covered with sand—about a four-inch layer. If you plan to do a lot of baking, make the layer thicker—up to 12 inches.

The next layer is insulation, essentially a form of expanded rock, or rock that has been heat-treated. Three main forms are pumice, perlite, or vermiculite. Pumice is the only natural product, the other two are man-made, I would recommend pumice, but that depends on its availability in your location since it's a volcanic substance. You will only need a two-inch layer, so the cost should be minor for any of the choices. Check prices at your local landscape or garden center.

Once the insulation is set, the bricks are placed. If you're using found bricks, remove any traces of mortar before setting them. Measure out the diameter of the oven size you chose and draw an outline on the base. Place the center brick first and work out from there. The bricks should be tamped into the sand four to six inches deep, depending on the thickness of the sand/insulation layer. When placing the second brick and any brick thereafter, hold it next to the set brick and move it down along the set brick's edge—Kiko Denzer, master of the earth oven, calls this "kissing." The brick must be placed straight down into the sand without wiggle room; otherwise the sand won't hold other bricks as securely.

The form

In order to create the dome-shaped mud oven walls, a form needs to be made that will hold the mud. Sand is the best material, but topsoil or some other loose malleable material could be used. According to Kiko Denzer's formula, the form should be a few inches higher than half the oven floor width. His example: for a 27 inch wide oven (half equals 13.5 inches) the form should stand 16–20 inches high.

Once the form is completely rounded at its proper height, place a level on the top and measure the distance from the top to the oven floor to calculate the interior oven height. Multiply by 63 percent. This seemingly odd number comes from a study done on Canadian ovens where the median distance equaled 63 percent. The result of this formula is the height for the oven door.

Mix the mud

Most mud mixtures contain varying amounts of clay and sand. It's usually 70 to 90 percent sand or silt and 10 to 30 percent clay. A jar test is the easiest method in determining your soil's content. Fill a glass jar with half dirt and half water. Shake it up and let the material settle. Larger particles settle first at the bottom—usually gravel and coarse sand. Then the materials upgrade to layers of finer silt and, finally, the clay should settle at the top. This will determine your soil's ratio of clay to sand. From here, you can make the appropriate adaptations in order to achieve the correct balance.

Once you have the proper contrast of materials, you can mix

EATS, LIVES

by stacey gengo

in buckets or on the ground. Kiko Denzer offers the method of mixing on a plastic tarp and continually rolling the tarp full of materials from side to side. Add minimal amounts of water, until the mixture reaches a clumping stage. You'll know it's ready when the mixture can form a solid ball without oozing between your fingers when squeezed.

Crafting the walls

The first layer of mud should be about three to four inches thick, covering the sand form. Don't press too hard against the form, but press the mud into itself. Use some kind of flat beam to shape the mud smooth once the form is covered. If the mud sticks to the board, wait—it should a bit dry before rounding it out. Once the first layer dries, another can be added. You'll know when it's dry if your finger doesn't leave an impression when poking the clay. The dried clay will have a leather-like look as well.

Create the door

When the layers are dry, a door needs to be cut out of the structure. Scratch a line where the door should be. Begin with a hand-sized hole to check that the layer's centers are completely dried out. Then, cut the door and dig out the sand form.

Finishing

A final layer of plaster can be added to the exterior of the oven in order to protect it from the elements. Wet the surface of the mud with a wet whisk broom. The scratching will provide a rough surface for the plaster to adhere. Lime plaster is the best to use and can be purchased from a mason supply store, but it's toxic. A better alternative is to create a carport-style covering of the oven itself, removing the need for a plaster layer. This structure would also allow for a protected outdoor workspace. Use any found materials you can find to build the covering, like a plastic tarp or wood.

A special finishing touch can be done by carving designs into the outer layer of mud surrounding the oven. Use any simple kitchen utensil to create patterns.

Light the fire

The first fire should be made when the oven has completely dried, in order to prevent cracking (if the oven does crack, just fill the cracks in with mud and let them dry). Build a fire and let the

smoke come out of the door. After about two to three hours, the black soot inside the oven should disappear. It's ready! Rake out the coals, sweep out the ashes and place the to-be-baked goods inside. The door must be sealed to enclose the heat, so place a stone covered with mud and a damp cloth facing the oven over the hole.

BAKE A PIE!

Rhubarb is at the height of its season. Take advantage of it and treat yourself to a rhubarb pie. A vegetable originating in Northern China, Tibet and Mongolia, rhubarb was initially cultivated as a medicinal and ornamental plant over 2,000 years ago. It was used to treat digestion, promote the flow of bile and aid the appetite. Culinary usage of the vegetable began with its introduction to Europe and North America. Rhubarb is a member of the same family as the leafy vegetable, sorrel and the grain, buckwheat. There are over 20 varieties of rhubarb. Only the stalks are edible from this plant that can grow to over three feet tall. Composed of 94 percent water, rhubarb is rich in potassium, vitamin C and calcium. It can be eaten raw, mixed with a little sugar or salt, but it's best cooked and made into a pie filling, chutney, or compote.

First, make your crust. Mix two and 1/4 cups of flour, two tablespoons of sugar, 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Add 3/4 cup butter and 1/2 cup vegetable shortening. Mix with your fingers until crumbly. Sprinkle one to two tablespoons of water over the mixture and mix until the dough begins to form a ball—add more water if necessary. Roll the dough out on a lightly floured surface to about 1/8 inch thick. Roll it a little larger than the pie pan. Place the dough in the pan, trim overhang, and crimp the edges. Roll out the other layer the same way and place between wax paper until ready to use.

Now it's time to make the filling. Clean three pounds rhubarb and trim the ends. Cut into two inch pieces. Toss rhubarb in about one cup light brown sugar, a pinch of salt and 1/3 cup flour. Place filling in the dough-lined pan. Cover the pie with the top pastry. Trim and crimp the edges. Cut vents into the top to allow steam to escape.

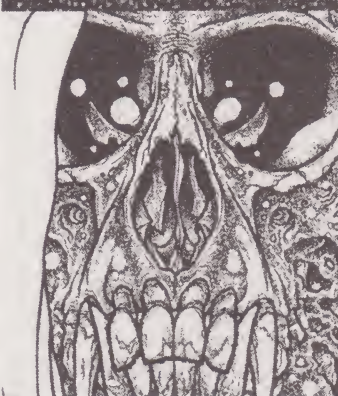
Bake for about one hour in your mud oven!

A piece of wood covered with mud and the cloth could be used as well. The damp cloth creates a steam effect inside the oven. Once the oven is hot, it should remain so for about two hours. Make the most of the baking time. After the baking is finished, you can dry fruits or herbs in the oven, or candy citrus peels and dry those out in the oven—the possibilities are endless. ☺

*For more information, seek out the book *Build Your Own Earth Oven* by Kiko Denzer. It's got lots of photos of the entire earth oven building process.*



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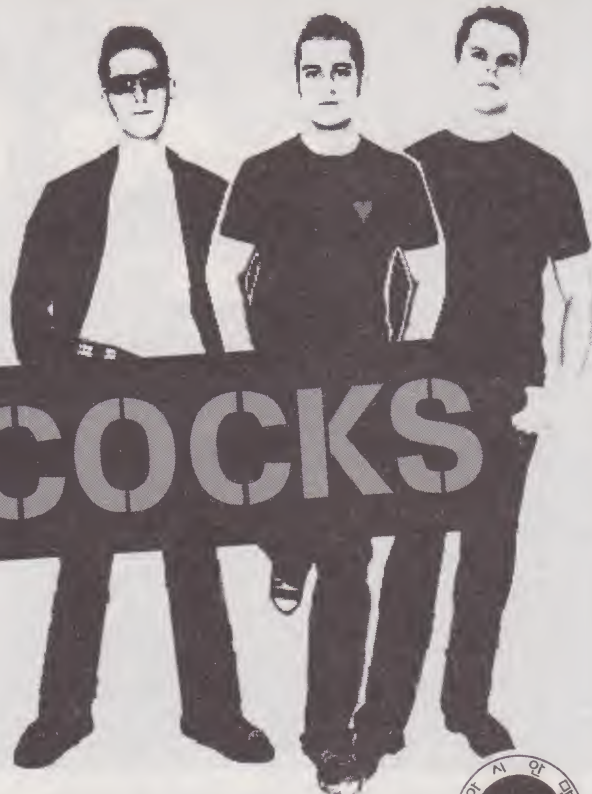
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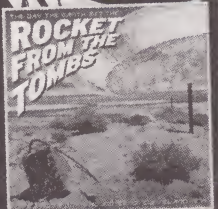
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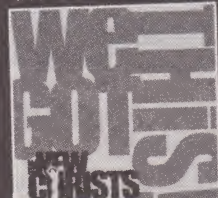
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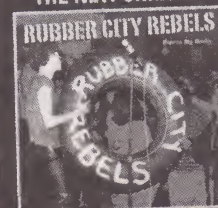
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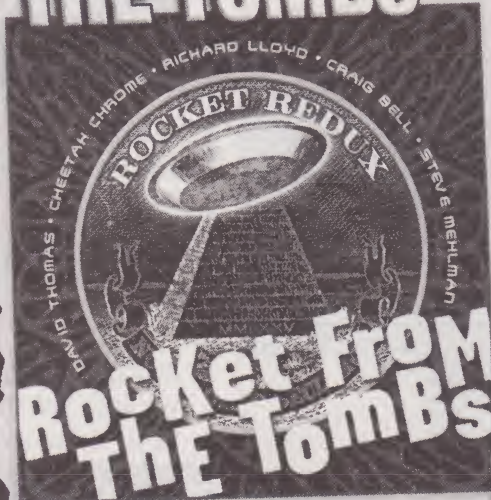
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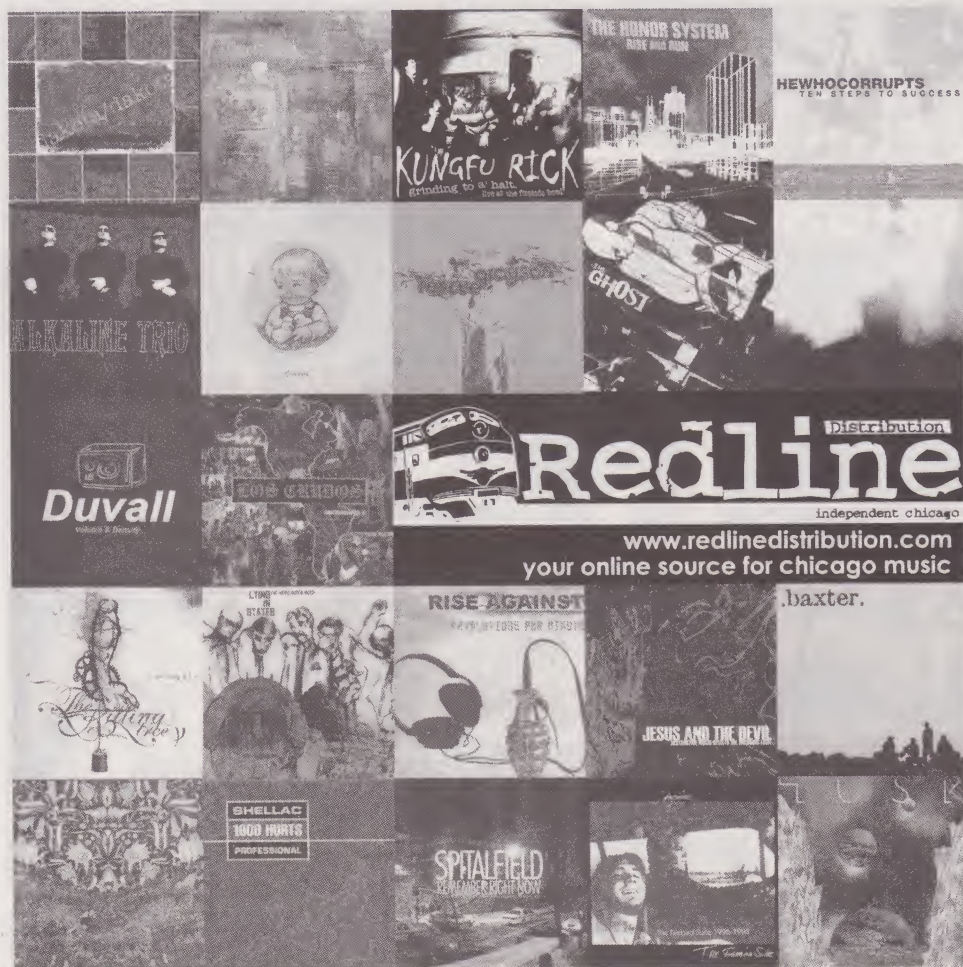
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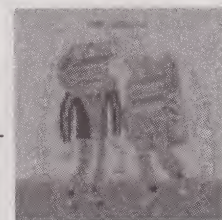
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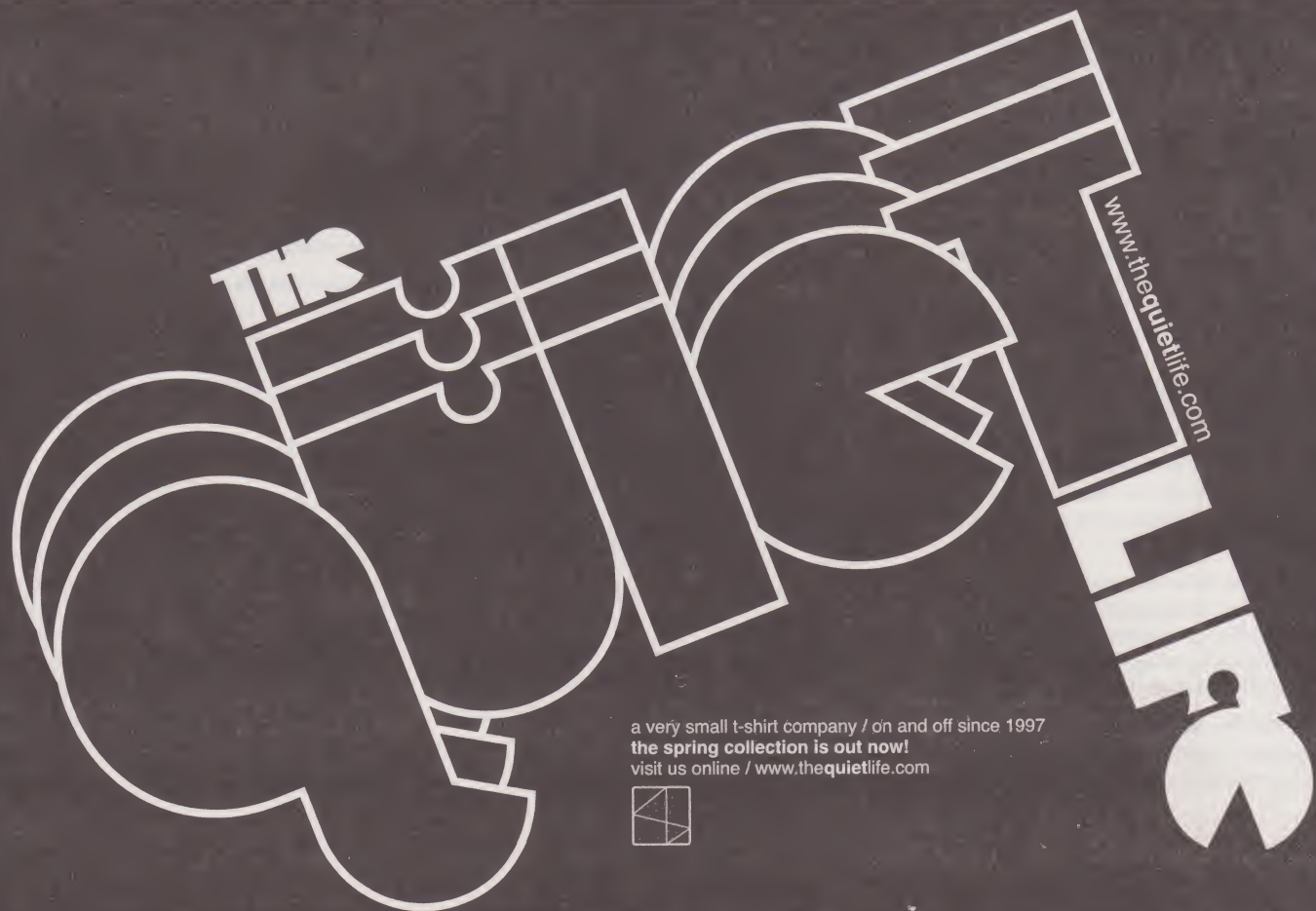


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THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Abbie Amadio (AJA), Eric Action (EA), Jay Castaldi (JC), Carla Costa (CC), Brian Czarnik (BC), Art Ettinger (AE), Erica Gallagher (EG), Melissa Geils (MG), Julie Gerstein (JG), Jason Gooder (JIG), Dave Hofer (DH), Don Irwin (DI), Ari Joffe (AJ), Tim Kuehl (TK), Dan Laidman (DAL), Krystle Miller (KM), Sean Moeller (SM), Dana Morse (DM), Bart Niedzialkowski (BN), Sonia Pereira (SP), Rex Reason (RR), Neal Shah (NS), Dan Sinker (DS).

Edited by Kyle Ryan (KR)

A Five And Dime Ship – S/T, CD

A long day or possibly a long month has finally offered a chance for reflection. You clean out an ashtray, twist the cap on the first Miller High Life and lie on your rooftop. Floating smoke skyward from your lips, your jumbled thoughts use A Five And Dime Ship's haughty, blue-hearted instrumentals as their jaws of life. (SM)

Self-released, www.afiveanddimeship.com

A-Sides, The – Going Gone / Seeing Suzy, 7"

Ooh, very mod. From the music to the artwork, this single is a throw-back to the rock 'n' roll of the mid-'60s circa The Who's "My Generation." I think once these guys add their own spin on things, they could be off to a great start. (AJA)

Prison Jazz Records, 431 Birch St., Scranton, PA 18505, www.prisonjazz.com

Abodox, The – New Knife Of The Berserker, CD

Like a high-performance engine with a cylinder that isn't firing, this record is very close to greatness, yet very far. That dead cylinder? The (now nearly standard issue for artsy metal) screamy, barky vocals. Otherwise, the music is spastic, dense, and compelling. (RR)

Self-released, www.theabodox.com

Action Now – All In Your Dreams... And More 1981-1984, CD

Action Now hailed from Southern California and featured pre-Pandora Paula Pierce on guitar and back-up vocals. Originally released in France in 1984, but unavailable in the U.S. until now, *All Your Dreams* is glorious '60s style garage-pop with some heavy psych/mod leanings. Any other band with this many great hooks would spread them out over three or four records; perhaps knowing this would be their one shot, Action Now held nothing back and delivered an LP that's great from top to bottom. The CD also includes the amazing "Try" from *Rodney On the ROQ Vol. III* and a decent-sounding live set from '81, which features plenty of great non-LP tracks. This is excellent stuff. (JC)

Avebury Records, www.aveburyrecords.com

Ahleuchattas – On The Culture Industry, CD

An experimental, instrumental, post-punk jazz trio in the FIREHOSE/Minutemen tradition hailing from the hippie capital of the South, Asheville, N.C. These 12 solid and rich songs are repetitive but trancelike. (DI)

Angura Sound, 82-A N Lexington Ave., Asheville NC 28801, www.angurasound.com

Album Leaf, The – Seal Beach, CDEP

Sometimes it's all about matter over means. This solo project from Tristeza's Jimmy LaValley may be electronic in its creation, but it's anything

but sterile. Even its airy and distant moments play a part in the EP's intimate, melancholy tone. A sweet, delicately handled record. (CC)

Acuarela, PO Box 18136, 28080 Madrid, Spain, www.acuareladiscos.com

All Astronauts – Navigation Songs, CD

These seven totally rock out with boy/girl vocals and really cool drums, bass and guitar sounds. They are a hard-rocking band from Winston-Salem, N.C., and are really fresh-sounding. Buy this record and see them when they are in your town. (DI)

Lookalive Records PO Box 20414 Winston-Salem, NC 27101

All Rattle And Dust – Stiletto, Stiletto, CDEP

Pub-rock songs with a hint of folk and country. The tunes aren't bad, just not all that memorable. Singer/songwriter Ben Driscoll slurs through his compositions about unrequited love and unfulfilled dreams in a voice that's almost a parody of the indistinguishable, drunken poet. (AJ)

XOXO Records, 162 Prospect Ave., 2nd Fl., Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.xoxorecords.com

All State Champion – Is It Nothing To You, CD

I guess this is the impending full-length that I alluded to in the last issue. How convenient for me. Well, All State Champion's full length makes good on their previous EP with a great follow up of dynamic indie rock and post-hardcore. You might almost expect this band to be on a bigger label or even MTV, but maybe they're a little too good and not photogenic enough (not sure on that last one—the pictures are kind of hazy). But they definitely have the musical and songwriting chops. The vocals are sung well, with the occasional faint yell in the background. The music is upbeat and rocking, but there's a fair amount of technical interplay between the guitarists that is deceptively seamless amidst the melodies. And the rhythm section is nothing to scoff at, either. Fluid bass lines and rock-steady drumming tie everything together well. For fans of Rival Schools, SDRE, old Jimmy Eat World, Jealous Sound and whatever bands I like. (NS)

Five One Inc., PO Box 1868, Santa Monica, CA 90406-1868, www.fiveoneinc.com

Allegiance – S/T CDEP

Yes, there is sXe music from San Francisco I've just learned—nü sXe with wailing guitars and screaming vocals. Seven new songs are included on this EP, five demo cuts and the unlisted "Bottled Violence" that is one of the better Minor Threat covers out there. (DI)

Anchor Records, PO Box 154, 3495 Cambie St. Vancouver, BC, V5Z 4R3, Canada, www.anchorrecords.com

Allen, Mike – Cirrhotic, CD

Mike Allen wants you to know that he's sick to death of the world. But rather than infusing his songs with a tangible anger, Allen's malaise has paired doggerel with vagueness. His annoyance is apparent when he asks, "Are the stars any less beautiful because you've scientifically overanalyzed exactly what they are?" but that doesn't mean that his sentiment is backed by originality. Cirrhotic's tracks run the gamut of gloomy soundscapes with pounding sound effects to mellow rock with filtered vocals. The result seems to be the watery work of a depressive, though not inherently bad, but in this case quite spiritless. Perhaps Allen should refer the following lyric (from "Dry") to his art when he declares "There's nothing left to offer/ So let's go, let's go." (SP)

Sun Sea Sky Productions, 307 West Lake Drive, Random Lake, WI 53075, www.sunseasky.com

Amateur – Choose Your Own Adventure, CD

The first four songs sound like older Chili Peppers, slap bass and all. The last four are more "experimental." One is completely fuzzed out, one is a dance remix similar to Daft Punk, the next is electronic with Spanish and English rapping, and the last song is a soft rocker like Steely Dan. Odd. (NS)

Self-released, www.ohmyamatear.com

Anata – Under A Stone With No Inscription, CD

Anata attack with classic death metal at breakneck speeds. This dizzying blend of machine-gun drumming, Cookie Monster growls and not-quite-human guitar-shredding reaches, if only slightly, past the formula for an intense romp through metal's speedy side. (PS)

Earache Records, Second Floor, 43 West 38th Street, New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

Ann Beretta – Three Chord Revolution, CD

It must be something about their name, but I've avoided this band like a scabies-infested dorm room ever since I first heard of them several years back. Who knew that they were such a catchy, worthy and credible band? Well, I'd imagine their countless fans had that all figured out by now. But for some reason I unfairly judged them. Ann Beretta is yet another band that's fallen victim to becoming successful too quickly. Many people in the underground might fail to check them out, which is a damn shame. It turns out they're as good as commercial punk gets, with hook after hook, solid production (but not overproduction) and lyrics you'll be singing in the shower for years and years. I don't know why Lookout ditched them, but this release is fucking essential. (AE)

Union 2112 Records, 78 Rachel E. Montreal, QC, H2W 1C6, CANADA, www.unionlabelgroup.com



Anodyne / Defcon 4 – split, 7"

Anodyne's two songs are midtempo punk noise that don't really compete with the better sounding and faster Defcon 4, who happen to play four songs. "Chickenz Bleed" is a slight variation on the first three songs—or maybe a questioning what just happened with the previous five songs. (DI)

Ammonia Records, 103 Calumet St., #2, Roxbury, MA 02120, www.ammoniarecords.com

ANTISEEN / Texas Terri – Sex & Violence, split 7"

When I first saw ANTISEEN live in 1995, they played one Ramones cover. Now their set tends to include three or so a night, so it's nice to have a studio version of their superbly brutal take on "Beat On The Brat" immortalized onto vinyl. Texas Terri's track rules, too! (AE)

TKO Records, 3126 W. Cary St., #303, Richmond, VA 23221, www.tkorrecords.com

Ass Chord Service – Massage Included, CD

Some veterans of the German punk scene have come together to form a decent punk outfit. Loaded with gritty vocals, melodic hooks and memorable guitar solos, this EP has it all. Both up-tempo and midtempo punk-rock grooves carry you through the six tunes here. (BC)

Ass Card Records Annenstr., 51 44137 Dortmund, Germany, www.asscardrecords.com

♫ Astroglides, The – Channel Surfing With the..., CD

This surf band from Israel(!) seems to combine Man...Or Astro-man? surf-punk craziness, '60s spy movie themes (think "A Shot In The Dark" or "Peter Gunn") and an interesting array of instruments, including theremin and flute. I listened to this all the way through and wasn't bored once. Probably because they're from Israel, there is even a slight Klezmer influence. If you're looking for a good, new surf album, you should pick this up. (JJG)

Fast Music, PO Box 14542, Tel Aviv, 61444 Israel, www.fastmusic.co.il

♫ Astropop 3 – Allies And Stepping Stones, CD

I marked off points early because of a song entitled "Bubble Gum Breakup." That's naughty when your sound already smacks of Juicy

Fruit. But all of those points were redeemed because the rest of this disc is good enough to supercede quibbles about songs tags. Astropop 3 (somewhat hideous and unserving in its own right as a band name) can be Robert Schneider of The Apples In Stereo with a bit of mascara brushed across an eyelid, at times, prancing through the same Britpop circles as they do. But to completely confuse Dan Villanueva for the Elephant 6 popsmith would be foolhardy. There's not as much of the overtly sugary wordplay or sunshine-cloaked concoctions as there is a familiarity in voice and an impressive ability to put together male and female melodies that blend perfectly with a tight, cymbal-y rhythm section. The ability to name things is something that needs work. (SM)

Planting Seeds Records, PO Box 64665, Virginia Beach 23467, www.plantingseedsrecords.com

Authorities, The – Foreverready, 7"

Four tracks of all out balls-rock with a noisy edge that reminds me of the great rock 'n' roll explosion of a few years back. The Authorities would have opened up for the New Bomb Turks even though they don't sound like them. Fun lovin', beer-drinkin' rock 'n' punk 'n' roll. (EA)

Self-released, PO Box 27093, Seattle, WA 98165-1493, www.authoritiesdevilmusic.com

♫ Bare Jr., Bobby – OK I'm Sorry..., CDEP

Hmm...the first time I heard Bobby Bare Jr. was when he opened for The Legendary Shack Shakers (an odd pairing, even though they share the same record label). My "uh-oh" meter went off when I saw him winding a bunch of flowers around his microphone stand, before he even played a note. The songs I heard that night (many of which appear on this EP) were just a bit too hippy-dippy for my tastes. I'll give him credit for "I'll Be Around." It's a great, catchy folk song, and both the live, full band version and the solo acoustic version convey some real emotion. Unfortunately, I can't say the same of the other tunes. His style seems very jam-band based. While he doesn't drag the

tunes on and on for three years like, say, Phish, even a three-minute version of "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing" is too much for my ears to bear. (AJ)

Bloodshot Records, 3039 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60618, www.bloodshotrecords.com

Bathtub Shitter – Lifetime Shitlist, CD

I love the fact that I can be assigned an album devoted almost entirely to shitting for review, and automatically it's OK because the band is from Japan. Sloppy and occasionally blasting hardcore with Cookie Monster/Elmo-In-Pain vocals. Another Japanese band fueled on what must be government-funded sanity-leave for the arts. (DH)

Shit Jam Records, www.shitjam.com

♫ Battery Life – Shotgun Loudmouth, CD

Take Mike Ness, give him a saddle and spurs and set him on the back of a Seabiscuit for a ride. After a day or two on the range, sit him down with his guitar and a relationship to sing about, and you'd get the bulk of what Battery Life does. Paul Almanza's rasp spotlights the Social Distortion in him, and the gentle, galloping basslines catting around with jangley guitars give the Alkaline Trio slightly more cactus in their cuff. (SM)

Avebury Records, www.aveburyrecords.com

Bayside – Sirens And Condolences, CD

Three years ago, this band would have no place at Victory, but times change—and how. Despite the charged intro, *Sirens And Condolences* quickly turns into a watered down emo-pop release that's dull, repetitive and awkward. Another miss for a label once revered for its dedication to hardcore. (BN)

Victory Records, 346 N. Justine St., Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Beautiful Down, The – ...Of Men And Of Angels, CD

This melodic EP is so earnest and intense that this West Virginia foursome must have found the sweet spot where constipation meets

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the records we receive (CDs, CDRs and vinyl only—so long as they come from a label that isn't owned/partially owned by a major label), but we reserve the right not to review something we feel isn't appropriate for *Punk Planet*. Also, due to the volume we receive, some records fall through the cracks. Feel free to send us your record(s) for review (4229 N. Honore St., Chicago IL 60613), but expect up to a five-month lag time for it to appear in the magazine. So send stuff EARLY, and include any and all contact information. CDRs that aren't advance promo copies from labels end up in our demo section. All reissues are also in their own section. Records marked with a little ear (♫) are "highlighted" reviews, which means reviewers found them especially noteworthy (not necessarily good or bad). Finally, please keep in mind that if you send us your record, we might not like it. The review is merely one person's opinion, written without God's endorsement. Any questions or concerns can be directed to Kyle Ryan at reviews@punkplanet.com. Please DO NOT CALL the office, as Kyle is not there full-time. Thanks!



the Bellakun / Burns out Bright

inspiration. Believe it or not, I mean that in a good way. It just has a sort of clenched up, constricted vibe, but it's intense and original—and it rocks. (DAL)

Self-released, www.thebeautifuldown.net

Bellakun, The – ...Cantar Para Espantar La Soledad, CD

Mopey indie pop that boasts lyrics in several languages, but the dominant cultural vibe here is English. Brit Pop suffused with ennui. It has its moments, but I'm not sure I'd turn to this record at a bad time. It's a little too sloppy and the lyrics too cliché. (DAL)

Has No One Ever Told You Records, www.hasanyonevertoldyou.com

Better Than Bullets – Round One, CD

The mid-'80s-sounding BTB have some cool guitar leads and bass intros with lyrics reminiscent of Jello Biafra or Kevin Seconds. This might be one of the best records I've reviewed in this issue, because it makes me want to get up and throw a Molotov cocktail or something in the name of change. (DI)

Self-released, www.betterthanbullets.com

Birds Of India – American Eggs, CD

Wistful rock 'n' roll with wide-open melodies and an impressive array of guitar licks. The six songs move between genres, starting with an energetic rock tune and dipping into alt-country. (DAL)

Limekiln Records, PO Box 4064, Philadelphia, PA 19118, www.limekilnrecords.com

Bitter Life Typecast, The – A Greater Love Is Still Unknown, CD

I've never heard these guys before, and I'm pleasantly surprised. This is emo, but in a good way. They seem to mix the guitar styling of Christie Front Drive with the melodies and vocal harmonies of Penfold. There were also times when I swore I was listening to The Smiths. (TK)

Outreach Records, 1182 Grevel Pike, Hereford, PA 18056, www.outreachrecords.net

Black Heart Procession, The / Solbakken – In The Fishtank #11, CD

Who's ever wanted to hear The Black Heart Procession "jam"? Their pallbearers' pace (pun not intended, I swear) is so heartbreakingly slow I'm sure they'd have the time to think things out before the song even finishes. Konkurrent's *In The Fishtank* series takes related bands, throws them in the studio for two days and then releases their recorded output. Fresh off their *Amor Del Tropico* tour, Black Heart's new, upbeat sound is tighter than ever. Teaming up with Dutch prog rockers Solbakken, the two produce one of the more cohesive collaborations this series has ever produced. Usually, the collaborations were laden with improv-friendly artists like Tortoise and The Ex, where their meanderings depart from all things orthodox. The pair here are more strident in keeping to traditional rock form; rarely does it ever seem like the two are struggling to lead. From BHP's piano-heavy noir tunes ("Voiture En Rouge," featuring fantastic French crooning from Swiss import Rachael Rose) to a whirlwind of noise ("Things Go On With Mistakes," a double-drum thumper that sounds like Pall Jenkins singing over Autour de Lucie high on Mogwai), these two bands provide a thrilling ride from start to finish. (VC)

Konkurrent, PO Box 14598, 1001 LB Amsterdam, The Netherlands, www.konkurrent.nl

Reviewer Spotlight: Eric Action (EA)

Mummies, Never Been Caught. Hey punkass, you don't own the Mummies' *Never Been Caught*? I understand it was 1992, and you were listening to Nirvana, but 10 years later it was released on compact disc, so what the hell are you waiting for? The Mummies used crappy equipment, played like shit and often sounded like they were one second from exploding—they were. *Never Been Caught* was one of three LPs released by the kings of budget rock that year and is the best to start with. So many great covers and originals I won't begin to mention them, but you need classics like "Surprise Package For Mr. Mineo" and "Mariconda's A Friend Of Mine." I can't even imagine not owning this slice of greatness. The compact disc version has a B-side, a compilation track and the magnificent *Planet Of The Apes* single. Hell, it is worth your money just for a copy of that single alone. The Mummies also consented to a compact disc of singles stuff on Estrus that is an essential buy as well. If you think garage rock sucks, you are right, but the Mummies take it and slap it around with their brand of no-thrills destruction. I am jealous for all of you who will hear this for the first time, because it should change your record collection forever. (EA)

Last five records on my turntable: Circle Jerks, *Group Sex*; Joe Strummer, *Redemption Song 7"*; The Who, *A Quick One*; XTC, *White Music*; FM Knives, *Smartguy Single*.

Blocko – S/T, CD

A melodic punk band from south London breaks out with their debut CD. A lot of heart and soul can be heard in these chunky, guitar-ridden songs. They're filled with lyrics about relations gone bad and depressing chords to keep the mood down. (BC)

Boss Tuneage, PO Box 74, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2WB, UK, www.bosstuneage.com

Bones Brigade – I Hate Myself When I'm Not Skateboarding, CD

Does it get any better than this? Thrash meets skate rock. Blistering hardcore with lots of songs about skating, great guitar riffs, solos, *Evil Dead* samples and a sense of humor. For instance, take the lyrics of "Real Ultimate Power" which simply state "Ninjas rule eat a cat/ Totally sweet death by baseball bat." I know there are lots of bands playing this thrash style these days, but Bones Brigade write better songs than most. There are actually memorable parts to their music. "Skate Or Die" should be on a new installment of *Thrasher's* Skate Rock tapes. And the lyrics aren't done just in a goofy way or in a living in the past way. If I were 13, I'd love this, and at 29 I still love it. This reminds me to replace my flatspotted wheels too. (NS)

Fight Fire With Fire, PO Box 254, Stuyvesant Falls, NY 12174, www.fightfirehq.com

Born From Pain – Reclaiming The Crown, CD

While not quite ready to claim the metalcore throne, Born From Pain may be the heir apparent by using the usual gruff vocals, pile-on chants and *chuggalugga* guitar blasts. Formulaic, but sure to propel these Dutch boys to heights alongside super-thugs Hatebreed and All Out War. (PS)

Gang Style Records, PO Box 434, Toledo, OH 43697, www.gstmusic.com

Bort – The Eatingest EP, 7"

A few doses of trance/techno/drum-n-bass by Martin Schneider, who collaborated on Plus 8, Astralwerks and Ghost Arcade. Definitely danceable in a non-bump-n-grind club type of a way. FYI: Schneider is looking for someone to release a full-length; e-mail bort@bort.net. (EG)

Ghost Arcade LTD, www.ghostarcade.com

Brat Attack, The – Destruction Sound System, CD

An Eddie Van Halen guitar intro kicks off 16 chunks of snotty punk. Boy/girl vox generally kvetch about what's wrong with media, politics, etc., but nary a plan of action. The apparent energy and heart of this four-piece is wasted trying to follow a formula, making it undistinguishable pop punk. (EG)

Steel Capped Records, 205-110 Osborne St., Winnipeg, MB, R3L 1Y5, Canada, www.steelcappeddesign.com

Brief Candles – S/T, CDEP

During the better part of these seven songs, your mind drifts and flirts with the idea of just how long a song should last. These cuts of cathedral-ish lethargy and echoing lead vocals reach five minutes and beyond in most cases, extending the drama past its maturation date. (SM)

Silent Film Soundtracks, PO Box 10641, Peoria, IL 61614, www.silentfilmsoundtracks.com

Briefs, The – The Joy Of Killing, 7"

Seattle's punk superstars deliver five covers of classic punk songs (the

Damned, Angry Samoans, Panics, etc.), each with the word "kill" in the title. A cool idea plus great execution (pun intended) adds up to a nice little record to tide fans over until the next LP. (JC)

Lollipop Records, 7 Impasse Monsegur, 13016 Marseille, France, www.chez.com/lollipoprecords

Broken Bottles – In The Bottles, CD

A throwback to '80s California punk à la TSOL, Broken Bottles are a welcome addition to today's regimented scene. This has a very silly glam feel at times, but there's an undeniable punch that gives it a good deal of integrity. The enhanced CD includes a video. (AE)

TKO Records, 3126 W. Cary St. #303, Richmond, VA 23221, www.tkorecords.com

Bump-N-Uglies – So Powerful So Beautiful, CD

The Uglies are proudly associated with independent wrestling and have the flair and looks to smack you down off the turnbuckle. Twelve tracks that make the "other" part of Detroit proud. These guys have wrestled with Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka for goodness sakes. Their website is well worth your time. (EA)

Steel Cage Records, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

Burch, Paul – Fool For Love, CD

It seems like many songwriters are more comfortable writing about broken hearts and no good succubus females than displaying an honest, all-encompassing vision of love. Paul Burch puts 'em all to shame with this release by performing heartfelt tunes that tackle the wide range of emotions one feels as part of a pure, tender, give-and-take relationship. *Fool For Love* has a similar feel to the jazzy folk of Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks*, with a bit of soulful country and honky-tonk thrown in. Breezy saxophones balance against soothing steel guitars, and smooth bass lines gallop in between tinkling piano licks, as Burch serenades his muse (whomever she may be) or sends that last-ditch plea out to a long-gone lover. Whether or not you've ever truly been in love doesn't really matter. Cuts like "Deserted Love," "Like Railroad Steel," "Lovesick Blues Boy," and the up-tempo "Sparks Fly Out" simply demand repeated listens. Truly beautiful music. (AJ)

Bloodshot Records, 3039 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60618, www.bloodshotrecords.com

Burning Bridges – Politics Of Dead Friendships, CD

Damn it. I really don't like this style of hardcore, mostly because of the fans. I'll try not to hold it against these guys, though. This is pretty standard NY-style HC, comparable to Judge and Madball. They did do a pretty good job of avoiding the jud-jud breakdowns. I do appreciate that. (TK)

Thorp Records, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Burns Out Bright – Distance And Darkness, CDEP

South Carolina's Burns Out Bright are emo, but in a good way: lots of power mixed with melody and catchy hooks. Emo playa-hatahs will probably dismiss them easily, but the mid-'90s feel to this record harkens back to a day when emo meant "emotional hardcore," not saccharine bullshit. (KR)

Deep Elm Records, PO Box 36939, Charlotte, NC 28236, www.deepelem.com

Bury The Living - S/T, 12"

Lots of angry punks down there in Memphis. Preachy hardcore with vocals similar to Ray of Today. Straightforward to the point of tedium, they lose me about halfway through with their punk rock three-chord Monte. Some nice, faster parts break up the monotony, but are too few and far between. (DH)

Soul Is Cheap, PO Box 11552, Memphis, TN 38111, www.soulischeap.com

Cain / Comin' Correct / Onfall - The Hardcore Connection Worldwide HXC Split, CD

A three-way split, four songs each from Cain (Italy), Comin' Correct (U.S.) and Onfall (Italy, I think). Each band plays their own brand of brutally chugalicious tough-guy hardcore to a T. I really thought that this style of hardcore would die out once the 21st century rolled along. (MG)

Bloody Tears Collective, www.bloodytearscollective.com

Calliope - Sounds Like Circles Feel, CD

A slow, gentle nudge of plush guitars and boozy atmospherics that remind me of how a good shower feels on a February morning—stepping into a lukewarm rush of water and working your way incrementally into a blistering temperature. Each song coddles and keeps it clean. (SM)

Thick Records, PO Box 228245, Chicago, IL 60622, www.thickrecords.com

Casey Jones - The Few, The Proud, The Crucial, CD

Straight-edge metalcore from Florida with lots of crucial breakdowns and pissed off vocals. Metalcore fans (are you still out there?) should pick this up because it's actually pretty good and has one of the funniest song titles I've ever seen ("If You're Smoking In Here You Better Be On Fire"). (KM)

Indianola Records 815 Gormto Road, Valdosta, GA 31601, www.indianolarecords.com

Castle Oldchair - Sad Pants, CD

There's something Pavement-esque in the pudding here, especially in lines like "Hey watch yourself/ don't stuff your dreams down my blue jeans" and in some of the vocal flourishes. All in all, this mellow, acoustic record is less chaotic than Pavement and more straightforward in its delivery of standard country harmonies. (DAL)

Standard Recording Company, PO Box 827, Kokomo, IN 46903-0827, www.standardrecording.com

Casual Dots, The - S/T, CD

It's very sad that I liked this record so much that I lost it somewhere between my car, home and work. Made up of eight original tracks and two covers, this excellent debut features former members of Bikini Kill (Kathi Wilcox) and Slant 6 (Christina Billotte) with Steve Dore on drums. The instrumental opening track, "Derailing," sets the pace for the fusion of garage- and indie-rock-inspired songs that are a nice combination of quirkiness, catchiness and '50s-inspired rock 'n' roll. Especially noteworthy numbers are "Mama's Gonna Make Us A Cake," "ESP," with its see-sawing guitar exchanges between Wilcox and Billotte, and the cover of Laverne Baker's "Bumble Bee." Buy. Buy. Buy. (AJA)

Kill Rock Stars, PMB 418, 120 NE State Ave., Olympia, WA 98501, www.killrockstars.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Amy Adoyzie (AA)

Elvis Costello, Armed Forces. Who'da have thunk that the geeky, naïve manchild of *My Aim Is True* would grow to write the acutely personal third album *Armed Forces* in 1979? When Rhino reissued it in 2002, Elvis professed in the liner notes that it was the first record he made with his audience in mind. Essentially, he was saying that he did it for the kids, you guys, because Mr. Costello *cares*. As such, I think it's his most well-written album ever. Ever! That's right, the man has recorded more than 30 records and contributed to a multitude of compilations, soundtracks and Burt Bacharach records, and I say here in this spotlight review that I proclaim its "Best Ever" status. In truth, I probably don't even have a right to write about Mr. Costello, but alas here I am. *Armed Forces* flows with a textured and more sophisticated sound, unlike the same '50s rhythm and blues lo-fi feel as his preceding two records. The distinct orchestration of pianos, horns, strings and the cover of that old standard "My Funny Valentine" add to the grown-up feel. The most well known track from this record is the cover of Nick Lowe's "Peace, Love And Understanding," which was his own tongue-in-cheek response to taking himself so seriously as an anti-fascist. Who else would laugh at themselves for hating fascism but our very own house geek?

I'll Huff and Puff and Blow Your Ears Out: Japanther, *Dump The Body In Rikki Lake*; Against Me!, *As The Eternal Cowboy*; Songs: Ohia, *The Magnolia Electric Company*.

Casualties, The - On The Front Line, CD

Old-school punk is alive and well thanks to bands like the Casualties. Fast, raw guitars and blazing drums again serve as a backdrop for the angry bellowing that rips the melodies to shreds. They seem to get better with each release, as this record again suggests. (BN)

Side One Dummy Records, PO Box 2350, Los Angeles, CA 90078, www.sideonedummy.com

Caffiends, The - Fission, Fusion, And Things Made Of Concrete, CD

Talented tech metal/hardcore that mixes in nonpunk elements. On their hardcore songs, they're tight and creative. The vocalist is solid and versatile. Then there are the occasional songs that explore their musical ability, even going into lounge territory. But they mostly serve to take you off guard from their ferocious attack. Definitely a standout in the genre. (NS)

Indianola Records 815 Gormto Road, Valdosta, GA 31601, www.indianolarecords.com

Cechma - Your Diodes Fail, CD

An original, rich and full-sounding punk band who can actually sing and play their instruments. As an added bonus they have funny song titles like "Joe Perry Is A Dirty Punk" or "The Super God In The Sky." (DI)

Self-released, www13prodigy.net

Challenger - Give People What They Want In Lethal Doses, CD

You read their poignant words and zines; perhaps you've bobbed your head to their former band Milemarker. They are Dave Laney and Al Burian, and they invite you to feast your ears on Challenger. Always rocking hard, Challenger switches between harmonizing and yelling, musically leaving behind a Hüsker Dü and Minutemen aftertaste. Drummer Timothy Remis keeps up with the duo's guitar-bass-vox assault with sheer intensity, never missing a beat. The lyrics are eerily visual, authored only by the hands and hearts of disturbed, passionate and slightly mad wordsmiths. Most of the songs might evoke jealousy that you're not half as disturbed, passionate and mad (unless you are, in which case I ask why you aren't making this caliber of music?!). Major standouts include "Death Museum" and "Blackouts." (EG)

Jade Tree, 2310 Kennwynn Road, Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetreec.com

Change, The - S/T, CD

Very metallic hard rock/punk with shouted vocals. The singer always seems like he's monotonously yelling at exactly the same pitch. Despite the fastness of the songs, this just seems to plod along. Maybe the singer's dullness is what drags it all down. (JJG)

Fight Fire With Fire Records, PO Box 254, Stuyvesant Falls, NY 12174, www.fightfirehq.com

Charmless - Hot Flower / Action, 7"

Charmless are vanilla-flavored, melodic mushrock. Sort of emo, with some yelling on the chorus to get across the fact that the singer is saying something REALLY IMPORTANT. These guys could probably make it on MTV or opening for Clay Aiken. (JJG)

Isota Records, 1442a Walnut St., #230, Berkeley, CA 94709, www.isotarecords.com

Chinese Happy - Apathy Is Worse Than Hatred, CD

Pop-punk stays alive due to dynamite little recordings such as this one. As influenced by power-pop and '77 style as it's influenced by '90s

pop-punk, Chinese Happy is an incredibly energetic and surprisingly original band that won me over instantly. Two of the songs have dual vocals, with really excellent singing from two different female vocalists backing up the band's regular singer. One of the album's high points is a cover of a song from the musical *Annie*. This CD isn't all pop, however. It also includes one very fast, old-school, hardcore song, a Rise Against cover, funny outtakes from the recording of one of the duet songs and an extended track of the band beating each other up with baseball bats. (AE)

Self-released, PO Box 485, Fraser, MI 48208, www.chinesehappy.com

Chop Sakis - Ghost Town Crowd, CD

From the ashes of the Reds comes a side band that can go with your excellent Marked Men records. The Chop Sakis are more pop then either of the above-mentioned bands and don't quite reach their caliber. The songwriting and hooks are still top notch, and two weeks from now I will be kicking myself for not praising this record more. The songs just have a sloppier feel that would make other Texas greats proud; in fact this might as well be a more drunk Reds show thrown onto tape. I am praising this to all of you; in fact, let's go on record and say that you should buy this Chop Sakis disc and enjoy your power pop with a twist in your step and a beer raised to the ceiling. (EA)

Little Deputy Records, PO Box 7066, Austin, TX 78713, www.littledeputy.com

Chrash - The Party, CD

Grounded in the guidelines for the basic loveable pop song, Chrash steps it up with bright experiments in up-tempo melodies, witty plays in vocals and lyrics, and the occasional adventure into the electronic. Intriguing and adorable, especially for a candid pop record. (CC)

Future Appletree Records, PO Box 191 Davenport, IA 52803, www.futureappletree.com

CocoRosie - La Maison De Mon Rêve, CD

The sisters' experimental, avant-garde, structureless songwriting creates a mixture of sounds that, in their individuality, somehow form something complete-sounding and worthwhile. Their Billie Holiday warbling, combined with everything from roosters crowing to bells ringing, make up some soulful tracks that are both interesting and unique. (AJA)

Touch and Go Records, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625, www.tgrec.com

Copperpot Journals, The - Pilots, CD

I reviewed an EP by these guys a couple of years ago, and they really impressed me at the time. I had wondered what happened to them, and lo and behold, *Pilots* shows up. The first part of the record is on par with what I remembered: powerful post-punk, melodic but not completely straight-forward. Shortly after the halfway point, track seven or so, the record veers into a mellower direction that lacks the punch of some of the other tracks. *Pilots* more or less remains in that territory for the duration (with a couple of exceptions), and it's a bit of a disappointment when it strays into murky alt-rock territory. When they stick with edgier material, such as opener "Atlas & I," they're really firing on all cylinders. Recommended with some reservations. (KR)

Firefly Recordings, PO Box 30779, London E7 5FE, UK, www.fireflyrecordings.com



Cranked Up! / Neon Maniacs – split, 7"

Oi oi oi! Both bands play sloppy street punk. I wouldn't be able to tell them apart, except that only Cranked Up! had any band info included. If you are into fun, political street punk or oi, check this out. (TK)

Puke N Vomit Records PO Box 3435 Fullerton, CA 92834,
<http://members.cox.net/2toneunityboi/pw/>

Creeps, The – Gamma Gamma Ray, CD

The Creeps are an above average pop-punk band that could have fit in many years ago with the Screeching Weasel/Queers crowd. Nice production and catchy tracks never leave any doubt. We can't all reinvent the wheel, and if you want more pop, this is worth supporting a small label. (EA)

Goblin Records/self-released, www.creeps.ca

Crumbs, The – Last Exit, CD

The Crumbs return after a couple of years of keeping quiet. If you dig the poppier side of street punk (Ramones, Screeching Weasel, etc.), you may dig this. Even though The Crumbs don't sound like the Ramones, these guys are in that similar direction with the three chords and a driving rhythm section. No band can be complete without these kind of snotty vocals. Not original in any way, but a damn good time for sure. (DM)

TKO Records, 3126 W. Cary St., Richmond, VA 23221, www.tkorecords.com

Cummies, The – S/T, CD

An album of lo-fi punk rock in the vein of the Stooges or garage-rock revival bands. Their basic drum beats could be faster, but there are some nice rock 'n' roll guitars and edgy, "don't give a fuck" vocals. Makes the good kids feel oh so bad. (AJA)

Self-released, www.cummies.net

D. Benway – Songs At Room Temperature, CD

The songs on this album were recorded over a three-year period in a multitude of settings, giving it both intimacy and veracity at the cost of sound quality. There are 21 tracks of lo-fi singer/songwriter material that overcome the occasional quality problem with sincere writing and delivery. (BN)

Afflicted Records, www.afflictedrecords.com

[DARYL] – Uneven Surfaces, CDEP

[DARYL] has an '80s new wave/'90s emo jones and bad. The combo works. Dylan Silvers' voice is distinctly similar to Ian McCulloch's (Echo & the Bunnymen). Synths and female backing vocals round it out. (EG)

Idol Records, PO Box 720043, Dallas, TX 75372, www.idol-records.com

Dead Celebrities, The / The Trip Daddys – Live At The Way Out Club, CD

The first half, by The Dead Celebrities, sounds like hundreds of other punk bands. Nothing special. The second half, by The Trip Daddies, is a little better, a rockabilly/cowpunk mixture that didn't ignite a fire in my heart. The best part of is the cover art with caricatures of the bands. (JG)

Fat Fish Records/self-released, www.tripdaddys.com

Dead Heroes – I Hate This Life/Unreachable, 7"

Spikes, leather jackets, liberty spikes, boots and braces—punk that Americans think that all Europeans love. These really tight recordings

of three songs have just a touch of gruffness in the vocals give some street cred. The poppy sound of the guitars takes away the street cred, though. (EA)

Headache Records, PO Box 204, Midland Park, NJ 07432, www.headacherecords.com

Dead Kennedys – Live At The Deaf Club, CD

First things first here, I am not going to talk about the court case and tell you not to buy this because of the rift between Jello and the band. Who cares? Instead we should discuss that this is not a bootleg, and the quality is even better than the live tracks from *Give Me Convenience Or Give Me Death*, a disc that shares two tracks with it. This is the final show as the five piece with second guitarist 6025. In 1979, the DKs were not big; this was before their first single was released, but damn it sounds as good as any bootleg or video I have seen. Featuring an unreleased track, two covers (Beatles and Honeycombs) and some early versions of classics, this is a must-have for Dead Kennedys fans. At least one good thing came from the court case between Jello and the rest of the Kennedys: a great live set from the disco version of "Kill the Poor" to the end with "Back in the USSR." (EA)

Manifesto Records, 740 N. La Brea Ave., 2nd Fl., Los Angeles, CA 90038-3339,
www.manifesto.com

Deadsure – From Your Head To Your Sacrum, CD

Locking tightly wound grooves with a bass-heavy modern rock assault, the sound matches the singer's former band, Sparkmarker. With crafty experimentation on dynamics, post-hardcore fans have another dose of mid-'90s melodic rock. Too bad it's 2004 and a Quick-sand revival isn't due for another 10 years. (VC)

No Idea Records, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

Deathwitch – Violence Blasphemy Sodomy, CD

Mix equal parts "Altars of Madness," "World Downfall" and "Slaughter Of The Soul," and you've conceived a bastard child no smart parent would let their kid play with. Thank God for promo cardboard sleeves, because knowing the lyrics to "Bitchfinder" might ruin this for me completely. (DH)

Earache Records/Wicked World, 43 West 38th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10018,
www.earache.com

Decapitated – The Negation, CD

Polish death metal doesn't get much better than this—or does it? I've only heard one other polish band, Vader, that just happened to be death metal as well. If I knew more about death metal, I would be able to compare a little, but it is what it is: Polish death metal. (TK)

Earache Records, Second Floor, 43 W. 38th St., New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

Defcon 4 – S/T, CD

"Metal-tinged hardcore, get yer metal-tinged hardcore here." (RR)

Ammonia Records, www.ammoniarecords.com / Rodent Popsicle Records, PO Box 1143 Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

Deicide – Scars Of The Crucifix, CD

Dateline: 1992. The place: my bedroom. The album: Deicide's *Legion*. I can honestly say I thought my tape deck was playing too fast. Less than a half an hour later, the album was over, and I was hooked. This

band was for real. I mean, check out the fucking inverted cross brand-ed into their singer's forehead! *Legion*—and its blatant disregard of Christianity—has gone on to be the highest selling death-metal album since SoundScan was introduced and remains a classic to this day. Four studio albums and one live record (recorded here in Chicago) later, Deicide return with a new label and 26 minutes of sonic abhorrence. While their last record reeked of contract obligation, *Scars* shows the kings back atop their game, butchering the listener with the heaviest style in the scene. Vocalist/bassist Glen Benton once again uses his distinct voice to its fullest potential, coupling the traditional low and newer-school high ends with perfect, ear-bleeding, Satan-approved results. Steve Asheim abuses his bass drums to fill any breathing room the listener may have, and the brothers Hoffman are as tight on guitar as the Bible is inconsistent. 2004 isn't the time for Jesus to make his homecoming. (DH)

Earache Records/Wicked World, 43 West 38th St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10018,
www.earache.com

Descendents – 'Merican, CDEP/7"

To know the Descendents is to love them. Here are four (or five because there's a hidden track on the CD version) new reasons to fall in love again. "Nothing With You" is the pure poppy-punk perfection for which the band is best known. The title track is the best Bad Religion song Bad Religion never wrote, minus the thesaurus-core lyrics. "I Quit" is a pissed off, catchy-as-hell rant about the virtues of *not* being in a band. The production manages to be crystal clear without a bit of sterility. If the upcoming full-length is this good, add another classic to the Descendents discography. (RR)

Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119-3690, www.fatwreck.com

Desperate Measures – Never Enough Time, CD

These guys remind me of American Nightmare, but with posi-lyrics and a bit of a heavier sound. Boston hardcore fans will eat this up, but it's not really anything we haven't heard before. (KM)

Youngblood Records, PO Box 236, Ephrata, PA 17522, www.youngblood-records.com

DiFranco, Ani – Educated Guess, CD

Educated Guess will most likely provide DiFranco aficionados with even more reasons to love her: It's got her signature idiosyncrasies all over forcibly plucked acoustic guitars, her recognizable folksy indie sound and a slew of songs about patriotism and amorous disappointment. For everyone else who remembers how quaint and new *Out Of Range* sounded with its fresh musings about sexual molestation and being hopelessly in love, *Educated Guess* is going to sound like anything after *Little Plastic Castle*. DiFranco seems stuck in her evident proclamations ("We are standing at ground zero of the feminist revolution") and her sloppy writing ("What's the point of all this pointless proximity?"). Nothing on this record indicates the sprite that said "Fuck you and your untouchable face" and then laughed herself to sleep. My only hope is that DiFranco gets back to editing herself with a discerning look at the sharpness of her art and goes back to her roots. (SP)

Righteous Babe Records, PO Box 95, Elliott Station, Buffalo, NY 14205,
www.righteousbabe.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Abbie Amadio (AJA)

Smoking Popes, Destination Failure. A masterpiece in infectious pop-rock songwriting, the Smoking Popes' ironically titled third album was recorded solely for Capitol, but served as the backdrop for the disintegration of the band itself. At 15, I heard the Smoking Popes' radio semi-hit "I Know You Love Me" and assumed it followed the usual rock-song formula: boy really likes girl, girl breaks boy's heart, etc. Little did I know that, in this case, Josh Caterer's heart could never be broken, not in the physical crying sense anyway, because this song wasn't dedicated to a girlfriend—it was dedicated to God. As we all know, with an unreceptive major label, band members at odds and Caterer's personal religious reformation, the group fell apart. However, they left us with an album of polished, original pop songs that are able to put a finger on lost love so simply. Regrettably, I never got a chance to see the band live, but with the formation of Duvall, I got to hear Caterer's inspired crooning live—a voice so beautiful it makes my mediocre singing voice seem just as heavenly next to his.

No apologies necessary: Pavement, *Brighten The Corners*; Cat Power, *You Are Free*; Yo La Tengo, *And Then Nothing Turned Itself Inside-Out*; Belle And Sebastian, *The Boy With The Arab Strap*; The New Pornographers, *Electric Version*.

Dirty Tricks – Bloody Breakfast, CDEP

These Montrealians play passable rock 'n' roll of the sort that's recently been made popular (again) by The Hives. Cool riffs and good singing, but the songs don't really have the zip needed to make 'em stand out in an increasingly crowded field. (JC)

Les Disques Grabuge, 2255 Des Érables #20, Montréal, QC, H2K 3V4, Canada, www.lesdisquesgrabuge.com

Division – Conversational, CD

Comparisons to the Smoking Popes would be a no-brainer, but after listening to these guys a bit more, it's apparent that they are a bit better. Sure it's pop punk, but it's moodier and a bit more progressive, creating a somewhat newer being in a sea of similar-sounding bands following that same formula. Because these guys are in a part-time hXc band (Miasis), they possibly take elements of that to bring a fresher sound to the table, presenting the new hotness, not old busted. So far this is my favorite of the pack for this issue. That's with nasal vocals and harmonies and catchiness that won't stop, or is that the Asian chicken flu? Anyway, look out, Alkaline Trio, Chicago may have a new favorite son for pop-punk or something along those lines. (DM)

The Magic Spot Productions, PO Box 146 River Grove, IL 60771, www.themagicspot.com

Duff Muffin – Eagle Eyes, CDEP

Silly name aside, this ska six-piece has a refreshingly proficient sound and really understands how to combine punk's guitar speed and energy with a classic horn section. Most significant is the solid vocals and socio-politically aware, but not overly preachy, lyrics. (EG)

Do The Dog Music, 26a Craven Road, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 5NE, UK, www.dothedog.com

Early Day Miners – The Sonograph, CDEP

This release from these slow-core Midwesterners is what'd you expect: somber, slowly paced rock with steady (but sluggish) percussion and barely uttered vocals. Almost comatose at times, they combine chirping crickets and quiet, repetitive acoustic strumming on "Mosaic II." The stand-out song was "Bijou," which added come life to their carefully planned instrumentals. (AJA)

Aquarela, PO Box 18136, 28080 Madrid, Spain, www.aquareladiscos.com

Emergency, The – How Can You Move?, CD

Here's some melodic, straightforward, guitar-driven pop-rock with nice harmony vocals. Not quite rocking enough or catchy enough for my taste, but not too shabby. (JC)

Self-released, www.theemergency.net

Endless – Decade Of Obscurity 1993-2003, CD

With a title like that, I wonder if this is a discography. After 10 years, Endless give us seven songs of boring, metallic hardcore with annoying screech owl vocals. This was awful. Listening to the singer's voice is like trepanning yourself with a power drill. (KM)

DaCore Records, 4407 Bowes Ave., West Milford, PA 15122, www.da-core.com

Ensign – Love The Music, Hate The Kids, CD

Is a whole cover CD necessary? The last time I tried to stomach the idea, Face To Face really let me down. I will give them all credit on their choice of kick ass songs to cover, though: The Replacements "Kids Don't Follow," Bad Religion "Anesthesia," Hüsker Dü, "In A Free Land," Negative Approach, "Tied Down" and Dag Nasty, "I've Heard," just to name a few. The more I think about it, this is a great idea to get those kids into some good *old* punk rock. It is really great to hear another band's take on songs you have listened to a million times. OK, in the process of writing this review, my opinion of the "cover CD" has taken a 180. Good job, Ensign. (TK)

Blackout Records, PO Box 610, Hoboken, NJ 07030, www.blackoutrecords.com

Epileptics / Flux Of Pink Indians – Fits And Starts, CD

Dr. Strange could have given more information with this disc or on their website. Not being a fan of either band, I am not sure where the tracks are compiled from. The Epileptics tracks are easy to dismiss, but Flux Of Pink Indians tracks are better recorded and catchy. (EA)

Dr. Strange Records, PO Box 1058, Alta Loma, CA 91701, www.drstrange.com

Error – S/T, CDEP

Error, a band consisting of blokes who've worked on Nine Inch Nails records as well as the founder of Bad Religion, melds the techno-industrial swank of NIN with ultra-obvious waves of malice packed into prosaic lyrics. The five songs on this new EP run together in a stew of indecipherably altered vocals and lots of volcanic electro-energy. While no song particularly stands out with cunning artistry, the band's swerving spirit is reasonable—and lyrics like "let's just fuck our brains out my love" (after references to "bacchanalian knowledge" and "carnal bondage") highlight the band's interest in making fun of current pop/rock/metal hits, which is always nice. (SP)

Epitaph Records, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Eufio – S/T, CDEP

Fast pop riot grrrrr punk with an anti-establishment attitude. Militant lyrics ("Stop entrapment," "Give me room for clearancel!" and "I refuse!") with unmelodic chaotic rhythms and screaming. (SP)

Self-released, www.eufio.com

Ever We Fall – Endura, CDEP

Good musicianship and production are not enough to make these guys stand out from the rather stale melodic-hardcore genre. However, they could be very popular with the kids not yet jaded by and resistant to this sound. Nice choice of artwork. (AJA)

Rise Records, PO Box 135, Roseburg, OR 97470, www.riserecords.com

Evergreen – S/T, CD

A great punk album from a superb punk band. Distorted vocals linger and scream through songs with intricate, fugazi-like structures. The overall sound is messily immaculate, and The Clash's looser style is often seen in its influences. Best songs: "Petting the Beast," "Plastic Bag," "Glass Highway," and "Zoom Zoom." (SP)

Temporary Residence Ltd., PO Box 11390, Portland, OR 97211, www.temporaryresidence.com

Everyday Victory – Oceans And Airplanes, CD

Damning this record for not doing anything new would just be the *start* of an avalanche of condemnations that would go on for days. Everyday Victory don't do anything adventurous, but they're probably decent draw at their hometown club opening for P.O.D. when they come through. (SM)

Rise Records, PO Box 135, Roseburg, OR 97470, www.riserecords.com

Faithfull, The – Our Own Hero, CD

This is such a great CD! I get the same feeling from these guys that I got when I first heard early Hot Water Music and Embrace, who both apparently influenced these guys. Highly recommended for fans of melodic post-hardcore with lots of feeling. (TK)

Reason Y Records, 747 Barnett St NE No. 4, Atlanta, GA 30306, www.reasony.com

Fallout Project, The – Architecture Breeds Rust, CD

Quebec-based five-piece with a strong political edge that plays melodic, doom-metal-influenced screamo. They employ some interesting shifts in sonic texture, going from trippy, tension-building stillness right into a slamming, heavy riff. A bit reminiscent of The Deftones. (AJ)

Dare To Care Records, PO Box 463, STM-C, Montréal, QC H2L 4K4, Canada, www.daretocarerecords.com

Faraway Places, The – Unfocus On It, CD

Unfocus On It is a hell of a good time. Full of '60s-style shag beats, The Faraway Places practically (and actually) rip off Archie Belle And The Drells' sweet, ass-shaking melodies. *Unfocus* is psychedelic and soulful in equal measures, a bright and pleasant record full of secret little moments—like the clarinet trills on "I Want More" or the jangly guitar lines on the Byrds-inspired "Can't Get Through." Good stuff. (JG)

Eenie Meenie Records, PO Box 691397, Los Angeles, CA 90069, www.eenieemeenie.com

Fer-De-Lance – S/T, CD

This Portland band has a unique, dark tone but the warbling, amateurish vocals take away from the atmosphere. (DAL)

Self-released, ferdelancel82@hotmail.com

Fifth Hour Hero – You Have Hurt My Business And My Reputation Too, CDEP

Existing on the tricky indie/emo/punk plateau, FHH employs both female and male lead vocals, seething guitars and earnest writing in their brand of emotionally charged punk rock. While short, this EP packs enough punch to hold you over until their next release. (BN)

No Idea Records, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604-4636, www.noidearecords.com

Fizzle Like A Flood – S/T, CD

Maybe I'm culturally damaged, but I see the name and immediately think these synth-pop maestros are talking like Snoop Dogg. In six songs, some of which are adapted from his former band The Laces, Doug Kabourek crafts delicate, soothing ballads that will put your antsy heart at ease. (DAL)

Ernest Jenning Record Co., 68 Cheever Place, Apt. 2, Brooklyn, NY 11231, www.ernestjenning.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Carla Costa (CC)

Babes In Toyland, Fontanelle. It starts with Kat Bjelland's dark melodies seeping from her blood-red Rickenbacher, Maureen Herman's driving bass lines taking the ominous tone deeper still and Lori Barbero's tribal drum beats pumping out the heart's vengeance. In that vengeance was redemption. From their sinister brand of hard rock, to tattoos and vintage dresses, Babes In Toyland's entire aesthetic—musical and visual—was revenge for every unnamed betrayal that young women couldn't pinpoint: a flawed capitalist society, so-called relationships and the iconoclastic bullshit roles dictated to women. Hearing Kat Bjelland's normally mousy voice become a venomous holler and growl was nothing less than cathartic, as were her lyrics. Influenced by Sylvia Plath, Bjelland wrote words that came from someone possessed by the eeriness of a murder ballad and the unconscious rage of the murderer themselves ("Right Now," "Real Eyes," "Mother"). But even without vocals ("Quiet Room"), Babes were tempered with a glimmer of hope and a sense that hate and pain were, unfortunately, the guttural forces driving ambition and the will to live. Not just to prove everyone wrong but to save yourself—because, despite what you've been taught, you're worth saving. To pigeonhole *Fontanelle*, their defining album and one of the most revolutionary hard-rock records I've ever heard, as Riot Grrrrr rock because of the timing of its 1992 release (as is often done) would disregard Babes' intricate, original musicianship and the explosive energy that put them on par with the toughest punk or hardcore bands, male or female.

The song and the scene: "Shipbuilding," Elvis Costello (*High Fidelity*); "La Valse D'Amelie," Yann Tiersen (*Amelie*); "These Days," Nico (*The Royal Tenenbaums*); "Sometimes," My Bloody Valentine (*Lost In Translation*).

**Flatpoint A/V – S/T, CD**

Torqued-off hardcore blasts from Texas. With songs that retain the horns of the steers from their home state, Flatpoint A/V make it clear they're going to do what they want, and they don't particularly care who gets in their way. Reference points: "Smash The Little Ones" and "Deploy And Annoy." (SM)

Redundant Audio International, www13prodigy.com

Flop Down / Downright – split, CD

This pairing of like-minded Italian hardcore bands mixes up their old school influence with a bit of '90s punk punch. Flop Down put a little SoCal punk into their raucous thrash, while Downright mix a little early DC punk in for good measure. A solid release, despite its muddy production. (PS)

Rebound Action, CP 7-01100 Viterbo Centro, Italy, www.reboundaction.da.ru

Fluf – 2k1b, 7"

I had no idea Fluf were still around. Two songs recorded in 2002: "Reach Around" is a slow, heavy brooder that sounds like Sub Pop circa 1990. "You Got A Knife" is a less-slow, heavy fightin' song that sounds like AmRep circa 1990. Fine by me. (JC)

Red Can Records, Destouchesstr. 59/31, 80803 Muenchen, Germany, www.red-can.com

Flying Lutenbachers, The – Systems Emerge From Complete Disorder, CD

The Lutenbachers' 12th record starts with a band and ends with a 20-minute freeform implosion. Deconstructionist and immersed in a sort of free-floating rigidity, the six songs on *Systems Emerge* work the noisy, no wave genre better than most—the cataclysmic soundtrack to a mental breakdown. (JG)

Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com

For The Worse – Couldn't Give Two Shits About The Kids, CD

Despite the pretty shitty cover art, these guys are doing hardcore right. Twenty-six thrashing hardcore songs from Massachusetts. Any band who can write a fucking rad song about losing the remote for the TV is cool in my book. (TK)

Rodent Popsicle Records, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

41 Gorgeous Blocks – Well I Sorta Know How You Feel, CD

41 Gorgeous Blocks play excellent, playful, light pop-punk, scientifically designed to make you place your arm over the shoulder of the guy standing next to you and start swaying. There's not a disagreeable moment on this fun-filled release of tight, short pop songs. Very cool. (AE)

Self-released, PO Box 542122, Grand Prairie, TX 75054, www.41gb.com

Frames, The – Set List, CD

This is a compilation of live tracks from one of Ireland's most popular bands. The intense cheering and nearly constant singing by the crowd suggest that some folks feel this music on a deep, personal level. The band plays their folk post-punk tunes with a lot of heart—there's no doubt about that. "Revelate" and "The Stars Are Underground," two of the album's strongest tunes, are certainly catchy enough to get

picked up by mainstream, "alternative," U.S. radio. But, along with the cool Velvet Underground, Dylan and Mazzy Star influences, they have a bit of a cheesy Dave Matthews thing going on. Overall, a tad too frilly for my tastes, but, hey, don't let that stop you from checking this out and developing your own, informed, opinion. (AJ)

Anti-, 2798 Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.anti.com

Front, The / 1090 Club – split, 7"

The Front contributes a punk rock-styled singer-songwriting track in which the singer utilizes a vocal style comparable to Courtney Love. 1090 Club play radio-friendly pop music with flutes and toy pianos. Yup. (MG)

Bingo Lady Records, PO Box 1712, Billings, MT 59103, www.bingoladyrecords.com

Gauge Means Nothing – The Absent Trail Of An Echo And My Future Plagued By Surrender, 12"

Japanese screamo with guy (screaming) and girl (baby talking) throughout. It rips off '90s emo, but the screaming and silly/incoherent lyrics distinguishes it from said genre. A mellow guitar instrumental brings needed relief. (EG)

I've Come For Your Children, 252 Barker Rd., Nashville, TN 37214, <http://www.childismine.cjb.net>

Ghost – Hypnotic Underworld, CD

The six men of Ghost incorporate traditional Japanese instruments with modern electronic devices to concoct a charmingly woozy scenario of spiritual hunger and dangerously colorful adventures. Tracks vary from 23-minute improvisational-sounding experimentations to psychedelic melodies with breathy Japanese vocals. Jazz lovers might be drawn to the instinctual structures and vibes. (SP)

Drag City Records, PO Box 476867, Chicago, IL 60647, www.dragcity.com

Ghost Arcade – Mr. Bossa Suicide, 7"

Electro-wankery that sounds like it was done on an old Casio keyboard with preprogrammed beats, overdubbed with distorted vocals. Sort of interesting yet painful, like being tortured in a Viet Cong prisoner of war camp. (JJG)

Ghost Arcade, www.ghostarcade.com

Gift Of Gab, The – Fourth Dimensional Rocketships Going Up, CD

Formerly of Blackalicious, Tim Parker has released a debut full of West Coast flavor. Not the Blackalicious, smoothed-out on the r&b tip West Coast flavor, but the Snoop Dogg/Dre type of thumping booty-bass West Coast. *Fourth Dimensional* is also full of traditional, hard-hitting stuff with tracks "for the ladies." (JG)

Quannum, 690 Fifth St., San Francisco, CA 94107, www.quannum.com

Girlboy Girl – Forget the Ladder, Climb the Wall, CD

Girlboy Girl play ethereal indie pop in the best tradition of old Yo La Tengo. It's the type of music that would be appropriate in the background of a Hal Hartley movie, or in your own mental soundtrack as you place your most dramatic moments into a personal hipster cinescape. We all do it, and we're all helped out by bands like this. They stagger the songs on this, their second full-length record, so that up-tempo songs are followed by slow droners. It's a nice device that keeps

the record moving really well and makes it feel coherent. Just as the restrained vocals hint at lost love and landscapes fading in the rear-view mirror, some fine guitar work drills straight into your heart with unique, driving riffs. The band is four-piece from Bristol, England, that has been around since 1996. (Two members used to have an acoustic project called He was.) (DAL)

Kittridge Records, PO Box 662011 LA, CA 90066, www.kitnet.com

Girlush Figure – Rotten to the Core, CD

Girlush Figure is an all-female trio that plays minimalist tough punk with a pinch of a metal influence, especially on the vocals. They're getting a good reputation from playing out a lot, and this ace recording doesn't disappoint. Song titles include "Blood Blister" and "Suicide Love." (AE)

Rodent Popsicle Records, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

Girly Freak Show – Demo, CDEP

Wendy Latte, the brainchild behind Girly Freak Show, writes boisterous pop songs that remind of a less crude early '90s riot grrrl band. Her voice, raucous, loud and sputtering, races through the four songs on *Demo* and perfectly matches the unstable quality of her angry lyrics. "My Boyfriend" plays off the somewhat clichéd and ironic obsession a girl has for a guy. "Too Fat" chants phrases like "too fat," "too white" and "too black" in an apparent attempt to chronicle Latte's experiences as an actress who is told she needs to lose some pounds. "You Can't Leave Me" throbs with the insanity of a scorned woman (much like PJ Harvey's "Rid Of Me"), and "Rain Song," the EP's best and sole slow, acoustic number, echoes the reverberations of a melancholy affair. While sounding a bit dated while she bursts forward semifeminist bouts of irritation (i.e. Jane Jetson, Meredith Brooks), Latte's voice is sensuous and sturdy enough to relish. (SP)

Self-released, www.girlyfreakshow.com

Give-Ups / Radio Beats – split, 7"

The Give-Ups give us a heavier take on Ramones-type punk rock, with singing that reminds me of the FM Knives for some reason. The Radio Beats side is a sloppy, lo-fi, rough-around-the-edges take on R'n'R in the vein of the late, great Problematics. Fun. (JC)

Say-Ten Records, PO Box 7586, Newark, DE 19714-7586, www.saytenrecords.com

Give Ups / VMCollision – split, 7"

The Give Ups have the post-Ramones punk sound down, and the downstrokes don't hide it one bit. VMCollision have the post-post-Ramones sound down and vary the speed a little. Not bad at all, and twisting my arm, I would take the VMCollision, even though they cover Screeching Weasel. (Ouch!) (EA)

Say-Ten Records, PO Box 7586, Newark, DE 19714-7586, www.saytenrecords.com

Glass Casket – We Are Gathered Here Today..., CD

It's difficult to put in writing what sets this album apart from every other technical hardcore or metal record I've heard recently, but I can assure you that it's there. These boys know how to play their instruments, and I have a feeling that it's not too long until Relapse or Metal Blade comes knocking at the Abacus Recordings door. Where to

Reviewer Spotlight: Vincent Chung (VC)

Big Country, Steeltown. It's a shame that most folks remember Scotland's Big Country for their one hit, "In A Big Country," but the band was much more than bagpipe-sounding guitars. Rising from the ashes of the Scottish punk band The Skids, the band found themselves in the heart of new wave after landing an opening slot on The Jam's last tour. Their 1983 debut, *The Crossing*, went platinum in Scotland and gold in the U.S., giving a healthy start to *Steeltown*, which entered the Scottish charts at no. 1. Unfortunately, in retrospect, everyone only remembers *The Crossing* simply for the hit radio single. *Steeltown* was no sophomore failure. What listeners are missing is an incredibly solid record with even greater emotional and political depth than their debut. The central theme around the record is simply to present the listener the struggles of a working-class town. If anything, the factory theme on the album art should be proof enough. It's about the toils of hard work, fearless pride, upper-class transience and the fear of tomorrow's misgivings. *Steeltown* a very human record whose message is backed with thundering pop anthems.

Everyone farts, even God: Paintbox, *Earth Ball Sports Tournament*, Ambition Mission, *CD*, *V/A*, *Let's Get Rid Of L.A.*; Call The Police, demo; Jay-Z, *The Black Album*.

begin? Upon first listen, I thought to myself: "This is what the last Dying Fetus record should have sounded like." Technical like a mutha', but with its three-chord influence displayed on their collective sleeves, Glass Casket grind their way through a perfect modern-day crossover record, all the while creating a unique sound that any sane fan of this genre couldn't deny. It's fair to say that no member of this band gets a break throughout the duration, as the drummer never stops and the guitarists form to create the aural equivalent of Good Ash shooting Bad Ash in the face point blank with a shotgun—repeatedly. Toss in some low-end growls, high-end screams, and artwork by Discordance Axis' Jon Chang, and this is officially the album to beat in 2004. Highest recommendation. (DH)

Abacus Recordings, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd, Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.abacusrecordings.com

Go, The – S/T, CD

The Go are one of those garage bands that wish they lived in the '60s and played at Andy Warhol's parties. There are fuzzy guitars, lyrics about drugs and an unmistakable Velvet Underground influence. If I heard these songs on the oldies station, I'd never know they were recorded in 2003. (KM)

Lizard King Records, 1st Floor, 151 City Road, London, ECTV 1LH, UK, www.lizardkingrecords.com

God Awfuls, The – Next Stop Armageddon, CD

Rocked-up, energetic street punk with socio-political lyrics along the lines of Anti-Flag. It's done well, and I guess it could seem awesome to a kid who's new to punk rock, but there are tons of bands like this, and The God Awfuls aren't particularly distinguishable from the rest of 'em. (JC)

Kung Fu Records, PO Box 38009, Hollywood CA 90038, www.kungfurecords.com

Gold Blade – Strictly Hardcore, CD

With the uncanny ability to turn any chorus into football singalongs, Gold Blade blur the lines between punk and rock, making a record that not only transcends creative limits, but does so in style and with enough substance to appease fans on either side. (BN)

Thick Records, PO Box 220245, Chicago, IL 60622, www.thickrecords.com

Grabass Charlestons – The Greatest Story Ever Hula'd, CD

Fast and chaotic, tight and melodic. The songs are frenetically paced but never seem like they're on the brink of falling completely off the rails like, say, Crimpshrine. The musicianship is great, the songs are catchy, and the lyrics are smart. Right on. (JC)

No Idea Records, P.O. Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604-4636, www.noidearecords.com

Gunmoll – Board Of Rejection, CD

Another quality release from No Idea Records. Gunmoll play poppy punk rock with gravelly vocals and a whole lot of emotion and melody. The tempo is perfect for head-bopping or toe-tapping. The personal lyrics are heart-wrenching and sung with such passion that you have to be moved. This is the first full-length I've heard from these guys, and I'm awfully impressed. There isn't a bad song on this record. The poignant guitar lines and vocal melodies kept this interesting right up

to the end. To top it off, the cover art is a nice painting by Stenvik Mostrom, who, I believe, has done quite a few other No Idea releases. Two thumbs up from this lady. (KM)

No Idea, PO Box, 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

H.G. Lewis & The Amazing Pink Holes – S/T, CDEP

The director of such B-horror movies as *Bloodfeast* and *2000 Maniacs* tries his hand at singing the theme songs from two of his gory classics. Probably cool for the hard-core horror buffs out there. Wouldn't mind hearing The Cramps or LSS cover either of these novelty tunes. (AJ)

Smog Veil Records, 550 W. Plumb Lane, #B501, Reno, NV 89509, www.smogveil.com

Hall Of Fame – Here's To Hoping, CDEP

This is a likable mope-core EP from Philly that could be used to make your average tough guy fall to his knees crying. The song "Best Mistake" is incredibly catchy. These guys could get huge quickly, so if you want to see them play a small show, catch them now. (AE)

Miss Fortune Records, PO Box 41132, Philadelphia, PA 19127, misfortunerecords@comcast.net

Hammerlock – Compromise Is For Cowards, CD

When I saw this album, I immediately thought "Uh-oh. I have to review this?" There is a picture of a guy with long hair and a baseball hat playing in front of a Confederate flag, and it didn't help that one of the songs was "Hate Is Not A Crime." My knee-jerk liberal sensibilities immediately went into code red. But fortunately, this band is not a neo-Nazi front, and the music is actually good. It is a combo of Southern rock, punk, metal and country, and as unappetizing as that may sound, they pull it off well. (JG)

Steel Cage Records, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

Harris – New Morning Pulse, CDEP

At first this reminded me of older Midwest indie bands or Vagrant "emo." But 30 seconds into the first song, I realized it was way better. A minute into the first song, I thought I shouldn't even judge this band in regards to other bands. Two minutes into the song, I realized that I wanted some orange juice. My thirst quenched, I'll attempt to describe the other 19 or so minutes of this CD. These guys play really catchy indie rock with a fair amount of diversity. Songs two and three are bouncy numbers with cool basslines, nice guitar parts and just a touch of keyboard. The first and fourth songs are toned down a tad, but still catchy and melodic. Song five is a short rocker that will make girls do that shuffle-and-snap-your-fingers dance. The last song is a slower, groovy number with high-pitched vocals enlightening us on the importance of the ABCs. The song dissolves into a little more guitar, drum and keyboard experimentation than the other songs have. I'm tempted to want more songs here, but these six are near perfect. Let's see if their next release can live up to this. (NS)

Urinine, PO Box 413903, Kansas City, MO 64141, urinine.com

Head Set, The – Ask Her Twice, CD

You'd swear the singer is the same guy from the Mooney Suzuki, that other soul-drenched rock 'n' roll outfit. This guy has a remarkable voice, a presence that kind of radiates through the record. Now if only the rest of the elements were a little tighter...a nice offer. (JG)

Businessman Businessman Music, 99 John St. PH 6, New York, NY 10038

Hearts Of Darkneses – Music For Drunk Driving, CD

Frankie Musarra's guttural beats and his brash, distorted vocals flat-line a few tracks into this 24-song CD. His synth breaks don't offer any relief or exploration of sounds. Monotonous at its best, headache-inducing at its worst. (CC)

Schematic Music, 376 NE 56th St., Miami, FL 33137, www.schematic.net

Heidnik – Songs From The City Of Brotherly Love, CDEP

Brutal Truth-style crossover songs. This really isn't my kind of thing, but there were some parts of this five-song EP that really caught my attention. Heidnik has a great way of adding awesome melodic riffs to the blast beats, which really adds a nice edge. Very cool. (TK)

Watch The City Burn, 717 Brighton St, Philadelphia, PA 19111, www.watchthecityburn.com

Hella – The Devil Isn't Red, CD

Somehow this is the first SRC CD that I've listened to, and it totally blew my mind. Hella is a drum-and-guitar two-piece that make enough music for four people. It's jazzy rock like the Minutemen or Don Caballero, only better. Jack and Meg White, you'd better look out. (DI)

5 Rue Christine, PO Box 1190, Olympia, WA 98507-1190, www.src.com

Hemmingways, The – Go Back To Sleep, CD

Rather generic pop with a smattering of flat production = me to snorsville. Hate mail commence. (EA)

Russian Spy Records, no contact info provided

Herv – Snap Hands, CD

Ewan Hennelly, a.k.a. Herv, is definitely adept at incorporating traditional elements (accordion, violin, piano) into techno's tripping tempo, creating his unique compositions using a laptop and a Nintendo Gameboy. The problem is you can tell. The blips and bleeps of Super Mario coin grabbing sprees are best left to the game. (CC)

Compactisc Records, www.compactisc.net

Hordichuck – We Get Beat Up, CD

This is dark, melodic punk rock with a heavy indie influence. The arrangements are fairly complex, but the songs are short and don't overstay their welcome or approach wanking. A nice example of a band mixing a bunch of different influences into something fairly unique instead just copying another band. (JC)

Redundant Audio International, 500 S Congress Ave #225, Austin, TX 78704

Horror, The – Insobriety & Insubordination, CD

Street and rock influences give this catchy punk a kick that so many other recent releases lack. The group-sung choruses are particularly good, making for great singalongs, foot-tapping and head-bobbing. This band would be right at home on Thick. (BN)

Self-released, www.wearethehorror.com

Hospital Grade – Written Axe To Trigger, CD

What a confounding blend these New Brunswickians lay down. You're never quite sure where they're going, and it ends up being a glorious thing. This record is unpredictable, complex, and catchy. They can be dark, layered and slow, then jumpstart into a driving, hook-laden chorus. One track even has a funky instrumental break. If you need to look

Reviewer Spotlight: Brian Czarnik (BC)

Vindictives, debut 7". The Vindictives kicked the Chicago music scene in the ass in the early '90s. They came out with basic, snotty punk rock and released 7" after 7", and we Chicago punks couldn't get enough. Joey Vindictive and his wife even opened up the short-lived punk store, the Dummyroom, to help put more punk records into our dirty little hands. But the best of the best has to be their first 7", released in 1991. I got the copy with the boy's face on it (others had the girl's face on it.) Ben Weasel appeared on this record and did some backing vocals, but soon after he left the band to bring back Screaching Weasel. All four tunes, "Basket Case," "I-900 I Luv You," "Get Lost" and "La-La-Land," are lessons on playing fast, basic punk-rock tunes that will only take about two minutes of your life. Joey had the best snotty attitude primed up voice and the guitar riffs from Dr. Bob were second to none. These guys still put stuff out every once in a while I think (their latest, *Muzak For Robots*, is reviewed in this issue), but get this to start from the top.

Five best bands to listen to with a broken heart: Manowar, Hanson Brothers, The Cars, Drill Team, Weezer.



at it in terms of superheroes, sometimes they burst onto the scene like Superman, full of spunk and recalling rock 'n' roll's glory days gone by. Other times they're like Namor the Submariner, zooming through the murky depths of a sprawling, messy musical ocean. Finally, they retreat to the Bat Cave where they craft introspective, moody sections worthy of the Dark Knight himself (Batman to the uninitiated). Some of the members of this group used to be in Not Funny Anymore, and they have a following in Canada that they're hoping to bring south. More power to them. (DAL)

Urinine Records, PO Box 413903, Kansas City, MO 64141, www.urinine.com

Howard Hello – Don't Drink His Blood, CD

Need a homeopathic insomnia remedy? I've got the thing for you: the indie/electronica of Howard Hello! "Ethereal," "atmospheric" and "coma-inducing" are just some of the attributes of this disc. Act now. (RR)

Temporary Residence Ltd., PO Box 11390, Portland, OR 97211, www.temporaryresidence.com

Huff Rally – Sewer Rose Symphony, CD

Female vocals jibe with speedy indie pop (ie: Magnapop, The Bangles) and quirky lyrics about boys (including dudes into Gameboy) and the uselessness of labels. (SP)

Self-released, www.huffrally.com

Humble Gods – Born Free, CD

This snotty skate and street punk combo packs a punch, but does little else to stand out. This isn't necessarily a bad record, but it is rather boring, and once track no. 5 rolls around, you feel like you've heard it all before. (BN)

Suburban Noize Records, 1317 N. San Fernando Blvd., #385, Burbank, CA 91504-4272, www.suburbannoizerecords.com

Hurry-Up Offense – The Labor Day EP, CDEP

If this band becomes cult heroes, we can trust that future generations won't drown and drift away in MTV/TRL "punk." Hurry-Up Offense captures the best of the last 15 years in East and West Coast punk, meaning they're a high-energy, power trio that's not too tough for great vocal harmonies. (CC)

Self-released, www.hurryupoffense.com

Ida / Low / His Name Is Alive / The Secret Stars – Angel Hall, CD

This live disc features an amazing eight-song set from Ida. Recorded live at the Angel Orensanz Foundation in 1999, this CD benefits organizations working to help those affected by HIV/AIDS. Encapsulating a really beautiful and critical musical moment, it's actually really, really good. (JG)

Last Affair Records, 332 Bleecker St., New York, New York 10014

Inside The Special Pillow – S/T, CD

For a band whose contributors include members of Run On, Sleepyhead and Yo La Tengo, I'd expect something better. This record is rather boring, stale and whiny. And did I mention boring? Somebody shoot these boys full of ephedrine, will you? (JG)

Zofko/self-released, PO Box 1805, Hoboken, NJ 07030, www.specialpillow.com

J+J – Spills That Kill, 7"

Fabulously executed electropunk with a pure, sugary pop sensibility. These songs are some of the cutest songs I've heard, with the perfect balance of weird synth cut-up and darkly whimsical elements. Recommended for all you fans of Casio-fueled electropunk (Numbers, Gravy Train!!!, etc.). (MG)

Ghost Arcade, Ltd., www.ghostarcade.com

Jai Alai – Drive Safe, CD

From the school of post-rock comes Jai Alai and their aptly titled record that would be an awesome soundtrack for rolling through yellow lights. It's not all just bleeps and boops; there are some tight riffs interwoven into their ambient, jazz-inspired landscape. (AA)

Sun Sea Sky Productions, 307 West Lake Drive, Random Lake, WI 53075, www.sunseasky.com

Jakov Goodnight – Anybody Else But Us

This three-piece is both enthusiastic about being emo-pop and works hard to accomplish said genre with some much-appreciated originality. Lots of lyrical imagery involving astronomy, physics and oceanography (think Hum). "Magedst" awesomely reinvents Otis Redding's "Dock Of The Bay." Danke, Germany! (EG)

Red Can Records, Kirchenstr. 26, 81675 Muenchen, Germany, www.red-can.com

Jericho RVA – Worker's Union, CD

These Richmond, Va., boys play emotional punk rock with pop sensibilities not unlike many of the bands on No Idea Records. The vocals are even gravelly like No Idea bands. If I had heard this a few years ago, I'd be all about it. (KM)

Iodine Recordings, 1085 Commonwealth Ave., PMB 318, Boston, MA 02215, www.iodinerecordings.com

Jerry Spider Gang, The – Exile On Mainstream, CD

This French garage-rock band does such a blatant rip-off job of American bands like The Dead Boys and The MC5 that it's truly insulting to listen to. Jesus! These dudes are such biters, I'd bet there are teeth marks on Stiv Bators' corpse! (AJ)

Lollipop Records, 7 Impasse Monseigneur, 13016 Marseille, France, www.chez.com/lollipoprecords

Jesse James – Mission, CD

Imagine horns and rock guitars living together in unity. If that sounds like paradise, dig London's Jesse James' new release. Recorded by Ryan Greene (Fat Wreck producer-godhead), this album sounds many times better than past efforts. (EG)

Union 2112 Records, 78 Rachel E. Montreal, QC, H2W 1C6, Canada www.unionlabelgroup.com

Joe Coffee – Bright As The Star We're Under, CD

A hardcore band fronted by a gruff-sounding singer, these guys sound really tough, so I hope they don't kick my ass for saying this sounds like another clichéd hardcore band with some cliché-sounding ballads. (JJG)

Street Anthem Records, 6201 15th Ave. NW, B#306, Seattle, WA 98107-2382, www.streetanthemrecords.com

Junior Varsity, The – The Great Compromise, CD

Sports suck, but this emo hardcore outfit doesn't suck nearly as bad as their name. It's a typically bland crybaby album, but the songs

occasionally surpass expectations, with a handful of the tracks being strong enough for a decent single. (AE)

British Records Corporation, 46 Sterling Circle, Ste. 204, Wheaton, IL 60187, www.britishtrecordscorp.com

Kafka / Deldump – split, 7"

This incredible split between two European bands is not to be missed by fans of fast-paced, contemporary hardcore. Kafka's been around for a bit and plays fast, old-school-influenced hardcore akin to Raw Power, but with a bit of an early emo influence. Kafka sings in Italian, but the lyric sheet includes an English translation. The lyrics are strange sociopolitical tirades about working, suffering and being decadent. The lyrics aren't preachy, and the singer's intonations suggest that some of it is to be taken sarcastically. Deldump is from Luxembourg and is even harder than Kafka. They are astounding and use a lot of vocal effects. Their songs are fast and tough as nails on the surface, but the lyrics (sung in English) are gentle, allegorical and impossible to penetrate. Seek this sucker out! (AE)

Bloody Tears Collective, www.bloodytearscollective.com

Kafka – Our Memories Are Only Tales: Retrospectiva 1994-2002, CD

This CD fucking rocks! It's a discography of all early Kafka stuff, and it's amazing. Kafka has an original sound, but I could pick out hints of Heroin and the Orchid in there. I can't understand the lyrics—they're in Italian—but, like I said, the music is great. (TK)

Bloody Tears Collective, www.bloodytearscollective.com

Kammerflimmer Kollektief – Cacaidiae, CD

Can I call this something that could be hugely pretentious, but is actually a really great mix of a bevy of instruments? Yes. Can I praise the soothing yet forbidding use of vibraphone and double bass mixed with traditional drums, guitar and other very-much nontraditional and electronic instruments? You bet. (DH)

Temporary Residence Limited, PO Box 11390 Portland, OR 97211, www.temporaryresidence.com

Katyn / Rise From Ruin – split, 7"

Rise From Ruin scream and smash their way out of Tennessee (like many before them) and do a pretty good job of knocking me out of the way while they do it with spastic rhythms and loud guitar work. Katyn do the same, but with more groove and German lyrics. (DH)

Crucifados Pelo Sistema, www.crucifados.com

Kill Your Idols / Crime In Stereo – split, CD

KYI still plays old-school hardcore like it was meant to be played. CIS plays a slower, more melodic hardcore, but just as tight. KYI covers Sheer Terror's "Time Don't Heal A Thing," for kids into that sort of thing. (TK)

Blackout Records, PO Box 610, Hoboken, NJ 07030, www.blackoutrecords.com

King Cobra, The – S/T, CDEP

Bizarro math rock that chugs sporadically and ever so briefly, having a Metallica moment before sounding like Jim Carrey's karaoke singing

Reviewer Spotlight: Art Ettinger (AE)

Pegboy, Strong Reaction. Naked Raygun was a classic band, but Pegboy, and their debut 1991 full-length *Strong Reaction*, will always have a special place in my punk history. Some people remember where they were when Kennedy was shot, or where they were when the Rodney King brutality verdict came down. I remember where I was when I first heard this album. I was 16 and was sitting in a tiny car packed with about 10 or so other teenage punks on a very snowy night in Buffalo, N.Y. We had been waiting in a parking lot to get into a show, and no one would pay attention as the kid putting in tapes tried to get us to listen to his favorite new bands. That all changed when he popped in *Strong Reaction*. Everyone shut up and marveled at the unique, morose vocals, bally guitars and unforgettable choruses. Two kids actually started crying when "Superstar" came on. I didn't get to see Pegboy live until 1997, but they still were incredible, and they're still doing annual Chicago shows that are well worth checking out. So far they've only done two other full-lengths, and it's unclear if they'll ever do another. Let's fucking hope so!

I've also been jumping around to: Infect, *Indelevel*; Circle Jerks, *Live Fast, Die Young!* (bootleg LP); The Traditionals, *Dead Society*; Diskords, *Blame It On The Kids*; Despite All This, *S/T*.

the Kite Eating Tree / Madball

in *The Cable Guy*. Now take that Carrey voice and have it impersonate Shonen Knife instead of Jefferson Airplane. How about that for a tough sell? (SM)

Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com

Kite Eating Tree, The – Method: Fail, Repeat..., CD

This fairly typical "post-punk," indie-rock release suffers from the use of overly commercial vocal effects usually reserved for rap-metal bands. The non-distorted vocals sound just fine, but once the effects kick in, it gets obnoxious. The more minimalist tracks work better than the ones with seven or eight subsections. (AE)

Suburban Home Records, PO Box 40757, Denver, CO 80204, www.suburbanhomerecords.com

Knifewitch, The – It's A Beast...It's For The Band, 7"

First, great cover art and nod to Mega Man with "Damn You Dr. Wiley." Somewhat contained screamy hardcore in the vein of Gainesville, Fla., The Knifewitch would feel at home on No Idea, I'm sure. Enough changes to keep it interesting, but never seems to fully deliver. (DH)

Dying Is Deadly Records, PO Box 1581, Boise, ID 83701-1581, www.dyingisdeadly.com

Lambchop – Aw Cmon & No You Cmon, 2xCD

Lambchop's quiet, resonating blend of pop with alt-country elements (violin and organ) is sweet and spellbinding—for a few tracks. But this double disc set is a little too much in one sitting for anyone other than a Lambchop fanatic. Buy the set and save one for next year. (CC)

Merge Records, PO Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, www.mergerecords.com

Langford, Jon – All The Fame Of Lofty Deeds, CD

From his early days in The Mekons to his latest albums with The Waco Brothers (and various projects in between), Jon Langford has consistently produced vital sounds, in a number of different genres. He's the perfect example of a veteran whom time cannot tame. *All The Fame Of Lofty Deeds*, a conceptual album about the easy come/easy go nature of fame and celebrity in our society and its effect on our collective cultural consciousness, is no exception. The story of Lofty Deeds, a country musician whose career ups and downs loosely mirror the turbulent post-WWII changes in American society, is told via the whiskey-drenched roadhouse blues of "Last Fair Deal Gone Down," rockin' two-step numbers like "Nashville Radio" and "Hard Times," and the album's heartbreaker, "The Fame Of Lofty Deeds." But you don't really have to analyze the album to enjoy the songs. At face value, it's a great "country-punk" collection with a strong barroom aesthetic, sung by Langford in his trademark raw Welsh wail. It's short and sweet too, coming in at just under half an hour. Another much-deserved notch for Langford to add to his well-worn belt. (AJ)

Bloodshot Records, 3039 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60618, www.bloodshotrecords.com

Le Pepes – All Fun Things End, CD

Le Pepes broke up six years ago, but just released this record of 13 full-blown indie-pop songs. The songs have boy/girl vocals, plenty of fuzzy

guitars and lo-fi noise. Sometimes, it sounds like Sonic Youth or any band from Chapel Hill. (DI)

Kittridge Records, PO Box 662011 LA, CA 90066, www.kittridg.net

Liars – They Were Wrong, So We Drowned, CD

From the song titles to the somewhat seductively frightful tone of the entire album, Liars' second full-length revolves around the legend of Germany's Brocken Mountain witches and the subsequent hysteria caused by such folklore. Still electronically based with a strong percussion presence and subdued vocals, Liars have wanted to move away from the whole Williamsburg scene. However, their strongest songs are ones that are the "dance tracks" so to speak: "There's Always Room On The Broom" (set to be released as a single) and "They Don't Want Your Corn They Want Your Kids." The eerie subject matter doesn't drag down the album; instead, the music's emblematic of the sorrow and chaos surrounding such events. (AJA)

Mute Records, 429 Harrow Road, London W10 4RE, UK, www.mute.com

Life Is Bonkers – S/T, CD

If you like Atom And His Package, you'll love Life Is Bonkers. It's like the same thing, only from Sacramento, not Philadelphia, and not as funny. (JG)

Self-released, www.lifeisbonkers.com

Lights, The – Beautiful Bird, CD

The Lights play a hard-to-classify mish-mash of garagey indie rock, like faster Pavement without impenetrable lyrics. There's a certain lo-fi vibe similar to all those "the" bands playing retro-rock these days, but The Lights aren't cheesy. Although nothing really sticks out at first, this seems to grow on you later. (KR)

Bop Part Records, PMB 1302, 1122 E. Pike St., Seattle, WA 98122-3934, www.boppart.com

Lights Out Asia – Garmonia, CD

Beautifully layered and ambient post-rock with limited vocals that match well with the music when given the chance. Bringing together technology and nature to create an expansive electronic field, Lights Out Asia creates some intense mood music. (AJA)

Sun Sea Sky Productions, 307 West Lake Drive, Random Lake, WI 53075, www.sunseasky.com

Lonesome Kings – Shotgun Full Of Blues, CD

Lonesome Kings fit into the more punk-rock side of the psychobilly spectrum. They're really raw, fast and no-holds-barred. The singer sounds a little like Henry Rollins. I liked this, but my criticism is what I would say about a lot of rockabilly: The songs sound too similar. (JG)

Emerald City Sounds, PO Box 14709, Richmond, VA 23221, www.emeraldcitysounds.com

Long Since Forgotten – Standing Room Only, CD

Ed Rose produced this, the fourth album by the Syracuse, N.Y., four-piece, and his studio trademarks are audible: Crispy vocals like an unseasoned Hey Mercedes in the front of the mix, with the remaining instruments falling in line with respectable effort. James Dewees of Reggie And The Full Effect provides piano on a track. (SM)

RocketStar Recordings, PO Box 54108, Redondo, WA 98054, www.rocketstar.com

Lost Patrol, The – Songs About Running Away, CD

Dennis Lyxzen of Swedish impressionados Refused and The (International) Noise Conspiracy not only has three of the least used letters in the alphabet lined up in his surname, but he's also the tactician behind a marvelous pop record that sounds nothing like he wanted to do and everything like what he's meant to be doing. In the liner notes, Lyxzen said that he wanted to make a singer-songwriter record that was more Black Flag than Simon & Garfunkel and *Songs About Running Away* does neither. It hardly counts as a failure because his rich sense of harmony and driven somberness stops him at an equal point between the two. However, there's more tenderness than agitation streaming from Lyxzen and his cadre of friends, who add to the warmth with pleasant cameos. It's honorable to strive for the flag and get something else. If you have 10 bucks burning a hole in your pocket, the album's fourth track "Alright" is enough to validate the purchase. It's the new "Walking On Sunshine." (SM)

Burning Heart Records/Epitaph, 2789 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Love Of Everything, The – Total Eclipse Of The Heart, CD

I've never come upon a fawn with a gimped leg, but I imagine that it would inspire the same feelings I get while listening to *The Love Of Everything*. From the outset, you're presented with a baby deer, gentle and innocent, but afflicted with a rock between its hooves or a slight sprain. It's limping through the meadow, open and susceptible to any attacks that could be made on its fragile deeriness. You'd love to string together a splint to speed up the healing process, take away some of the pain and give the little guy a chance. Bobby Burg and Matt Clark sound like the that fictitious white-tail, crossing wires with Atom And His Package and The Weakerthans, though not hitting as many notes as the nasal-drip Atom. But there's no sorry in the songs. Unlike the fawn, these 14 tracks send out a signal that they don't need to be fixed. They're flawed and perfect and a real treat. (SM)

Brilliant, PO Box 578780, Chicago, IL 60657-8780, www.brilliant.com

Macabre – Murder Metal, CD

This joke metal record makes a mockery of the genre. The singer shrieks on and on about werewolves and bloody ice picks over flaccid, Megadeth-type riffs. Stupid, not funny. (AJ)

Season Of Mist, 931 N. Second St., Philadelphia, PA 19123, www.season-of-mist.com

Madball – N.Y.H.C., CDEP

This EP contains a cool multimedia portion with pictures, a live video and a video biography. I haven't listened to Madball in a long time, but I watched all of the extra video material, and I'm glad that these guys are still around. Lots of bands try to play this type of music, but this is the real deal: authentic NYHC with groove, brutal riffs, honest lyrics and good melodies. They sound more like Agnostic Front than Agnostic Front does these days. Unlike similar bands, Madball don't seem to convey anger for anger's sake, and the music isn't just an excuse for breakdowns and bad hardcore dances. This EP contains three power-

Reviewer Spotlight: Erica Gallagher (EG)

The Darkness, Permission To Land. Slap on those cuffs (animal print preferably). I am guilty of loving The Darkness, specifically the British retro arena rock/hairband's debut full-length *Permission To Land*. Hyper-theatrical leadman Justin Hawkins has Freddie Mercury's glass-shattering falsettos and Diamond Dave's pep-rally scissor kicks (not to mention the fugly mug of a young Peter Frampton). Hawkins' guitarist brother Dan (master of rad power chord progressions and guitar solos) and fellow bandmates all have their own unique stage personas. Like Aerosmith or the Stones, you get the feeling these guys will rock together into their Viagra years. Despite some sound/style similarities to big-hitters Queen, Boston and early Cheap Trick or Van Halen, The Darkness delivers good times without becoming overly gushy or serious. Spinning tales of young lust and bittersweet breakups ("Friday Night," "Holding My Own," respectively), The Darkness only slows down for an occasional power ballad ("Love is Only A Feeling"). Yes, I'm privy to the fact that some people (mostly finicky rock purists) have written off The Darkness is a joke à la Spinal Tap or claim the hype around the group is unjustifiable. Hey naysayers, remove the big stick from up your ass and indulge—you have my permission.

Good sounds: Dr. Ring Ding & the Senior All-Stars, *Ram Di Dance*; Yeah Yeah Yeahs, *Fever To Tell*; The BellRays, *Raw Collection*; American Graffiti soundtrack.



ful new songs and a cover of an older song, this time sung in Spanish. Sure, they're not reinventing the hardcore wheel, but they're sure taking it for a good spin! I'm very sorry for that last sentence. (NS)
Thorp, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Madcap – Under Suspicion, CD

Remember that episode of *The Brady Bunch* where Marcia dates the captain of the rival high school football team, who comes over to the Brady house and steals Greg's playbook? That episode is like this CD, with Madcap as Marcia's boyfriend and the Bouncing Souls as Greg Brady. (JC)
Victory Records, 346 N. Justice St., Suite 504, Chicago IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Magic Carpathians, The / Cerberus Shoal – The Life & Times of..., split CD

This free-for-all exchange of retooled songs, ideas and compositions between two bands could've had a disastrous outcome. But the meandering noise of "Respooned" is countered by the hypnotic rhythm and cooing vocals "Continuumed." An interesting balancing act if nothing else. (CC)

North East Indie, PO Box 13015, Portland, ME 04104

Mahjongg – Machinegong, CDEP

If it weren't for Mahjongg's casual confidence, their segues between '80s new wave tempos, Afro-Cuban beats and surf-edged guitar would seem a lot more contrived. Instead, their dead-on sense of great song structure and layering of aesthetics makes their debut simultaneously mesmerizing in its musicianship and irresistibly danceable. (CC)

Cold Crush, PO Box 348, Hollywood, CA 90078, www.coldcrushrecords.com

Main Frame, The – Curse Of Evolution, CD

With its stripped down production, this is an album of old school post-punk that's heavy on the synth. They have a knack for writing abstract lyrics that aren't completely indecipherable in meaning and set the tone for the music and distraught-sounding vocals. (AJA)

Bird In Hand Records, PO Box 19066, Long Beach, CA 90807, www.birdinhandrecords.com

Medic – Greetings and Amputations CDEP

Fewer than 11 minutes and four songs with growling vocals and wicked drums, thick bass and screeching guitars. Medic brings a mix of punk and metal to the table from the Maryland suburbs. I'll check back after seeing them later in the week to see if they sound this good live. (DJ)
McCarthyism Records, 7209 25th Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20783-2752, www.mccarthyrism.org

Mental – Get an Oxygen Tank!, CD

This is a complete blast from the past sound of '80s East Coast/NYHC, but taking it to the next level of grittier punk rock. What these guys lack in substance, they make up for in crew anthems, danceable tunes, change to pick up, a sense of humor, fist-banging and the opportunity to see how many times they can mention their band name in the tunes. This is a quality release for fans of the old school like AF, early Cro-Mags, early D.R.I. or SOIA, among others. And to boot, these guys rock out Super-tough's "Searching for the Light." How's them apples for ya? (DM)

Bridge Nine Records, PO Box 990052 Boston, MA 02199, www.bridge9.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Melissa Geils (MG)

The Homosexuals, S/T. The Homosexuals were one of England's most overlooked art-punk bands of the famed 1978-'81 period, though they've gained some well-deserved recognition with this recent CD release (on Morphius Archives), which compiles all of their material from '78-'79. They were a typical group of the time: a trio (which included former and future members of the Rejects and This Heat, among several other obscure projects) utilizing shock value a bit and playing short, frenetic songs with an aura of stop-short melodics and a swaggering artrock/post-punk appeal. Combining elements of punk, avant garde, art rock, dub, reggae and garage, The Homosexuals kept their songs at a distance—short and simple (hardly any tracks reach or expand over the three-minute mark) yet addictingly ear-catching. "Neutron Lover" is a fast and sloppy three-chord straight-up punk song with a pop twist (not unlike most of the Damned's earlier recordings). "Naming Of Parts" is a stark and atonal/off-kilter masterpiece. "All About Cheap" is a strange, atmospheric, dubby and minimal track with odd vocal timing and piano ramblings. This is essential listening for anyone interested in the Buzzcocks, The Fall, early Gang Of Four, and (especially) Wire.

Been listening to: Frog Eyes, *The Golden River*, T. Raumschmiere, *Radio Blackout*; Mahjongg, *Machinegong EP*; Bobby Conn, *The Homeland*; Plaguebringer, *Demo CD*.

Mezzanine-c14 – He Keeps Silent And Sacrifices Himself, CD

Slightly shoddy hardcore that's a step above your typical chug-chug crap in terms of interesting musicianship, but still stands uncomfortably somewhere between early '90s emo(core), mathy post-rock, and I don't even know what else. Intense, but not stylistically evolved enough for a comfortable listen yet. (MG)

Break Even Recs, PO Box 42469, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.breakeven.org

Mighty Stars, The – Are Go!, CD

The British revival of the whole garage-punk sound is here from the heartland. This five-song EP is definitely an homage to that sound, but I think this comes up short on some of the songs. Probably with a bit more time under their belts, these guys will capture that sound. (DM)
Avebury Records, www.aveburyrecords.com

Mr. T Experience, The – Yesterday Rules, CD

Dr. Frank and the Mr. T. Experience have crafted one hell of a pop-folk-rock record. These guys have been doing it since 1986, but this release is a very mature effort, as listening to it you will wonder why the heck it wasn't up for a Grammy. Yep, it is *that* musically mature. (BC)
Lookout Records, 3264 Adeline St., Berkeley, CA 94705, www.lookoutrecords.com

Modern Day Urban Barbarians – The Endless Retreat, CD

This drum-and-bass duo play stripped down, semi-groovy noise rock. They pull this style off best when they mix in a bit of traditional song structure. "Statement," "Outer Space" and "Slave" (with great lyrics that accurately describe the frustration of being stuck in a dead-end job) are worth checking out. (AJ)

Public Eyesore/South Sixth Records, c/o Bryan Day, 2464 Harney St., Apt. 15, Omaha, NE 68131, www.sinkhole.net/pehome/

Modern Life Is War – My Love, My Way, CD

Boring "modern" hardcore. Basically, it's dudes with blown egos from their adolescent nerdiness proving something later in life by screaming like assholes, playing overused metal/mosh/hardcore combos, incorporating embarrassing crew vocals and singing about "truth," "strength," and maybe social problems. It was cool for about five minutes in the '90s, guys. (MG)

Martyr Records, PO Box 955, Harriman, NY 10926, www.martyrrecords.com

Monolith, The – Here Comes The Monolith, CD

An album of catchy pop rock reminiscent of Superchunk and The New Pornographers. They incorporate a nice blend of instrumentation, dual boy/girl vocals and enough variation in the pacing of their songs to keep the album from dragging. (AJA)

Fortune Records, PO Box 11302, Berkeley, CA 94712, www.fortunerecords.com

Monster X – Indoctrination: Complete Discography, CD

Monster X was a super-fast, death-metal-tinged hardcore band from the early to mid-'90s, when coining things "power-violence" was all the rage. I understand that complete discographies are a nice thing to have, but I'd almost rather just have a best-of instead. Too much to wade through. (DH)

Hater Of God Records, PO Box 666, Troy, NY 12181, www.haterofgod.com

M.O.T.O. – Kill Moto, CD

Many contemporary garage bands max out at 11, hoping their threads make up for lack of talent. Not Chicago's M.O.T.O. Their humorous lo-fi punk isn't afraid to step back and let the harmonies shine over brilliant pop hooks, but still sounds as spontaneous as The Ramones wanted it to be. (VC)

Criminal IQ Records/Little Teddy Recordings, 3540 N. Southport, Chicago, IL 60657, www.criminaliq.com

MOTO – Spiral Slouch, 7"

This four-song record has a ton of originality from this Chicagoland rock band. Great pop melodies that will stick in your head all day if you want them to or not. It's on Shit Sandwich Records, but this is indeed good shit! (BC)

Shit Sandwich Records, 3107 N. Rockwell, Chicago, IL 60618, www.shitsandwichrecords.com

Motorcycle Prom Dates, The / The Shutups – split, CD

The Motorcycle Prom Dates are hard rock/punk that made me think of the Hellacopters or the Spitfires. Not bad, but they sound like a lot of other bands. The Shutups are similar but a little harder. They also made me yawn. (JG)

Almost Good Music, almost_good_music@hotmail.com

Mumbajumba – Noise Pollution, CD

Listening to Mumbajumba is like traveling through time back to a New York VFW hall circa 1995. Incoherent metal core that borrows liberally from Slayer and Bloodlet, while never quite matching the intensity of either band. (PS)

Fuori Sede Records, fuorisedehc@iiberio.it

Mustaphamond, 7"

Mustaphamond's quick flux between hardcore and meandering dark, melodic breaks can be a little harsh and jarring, and is on Side A's "Flammable Dreams for a Culture of Nightmares." But Side B's "It's Opposite Day I Love You" is a much tighter track. (CC)

Grey Sky Records, 1631 NE Broadway PMB 109, Portland, OR 97232

National Eye – The Meter Glows, CD

One of National Eye's cast of revolving vocalists sounds undeniably like Neil Young, a fact that's impossible to ignore given the acoustic sound at the band's core. Like their oddball godfather—divided between the musical dreamworld of the mind and an acoustic timbre as tangible as red clay dirt—National Eye clear room for electrified and synthetic sounds to entangle themselves in the band's roots. The effect varies: lushly jaded, a bit touched in the head, heartbreaking and sonic. Not to mention their obvious penchant for pop songs from the past. All that tied together by the expert mixing of fellow pop fetishist, Thom Monahan (Sliver Jews, J. Mascis), makes for a pretty stellar debut. (CC)

Feel Records, PO Box 1221 Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159, www.feelrecords.com

Never Surrender – S/T, CDEP

Never Surrender is headed by Porcell from Youth Of Today, Judge and Shelter. The music is fast and heavy hardcore. This CD only has five

songs on it, but there is a short Quicktime interview with him that was pretty interesting. (TK)

Fight Fire with Fire Records, PO Box 254, Stuyvesant Falls, NY 12174, www.fightfirehq.com

🔗 New Black – S/T, CD

A thoughtful take on frenetic and wiry art-punk with a pop-punk backbone and a new wave feel. Instead of falling into the copycat wagon that so many bands are currently stuck in, these musicians react to each other in such a way that their influences (Wire, Siouxsie, Devo) are welded into a body of sound that's surprisingly original. Typical punk mechanics are hardwired with cosmic keyboard lines and luscious bass rhythms—a great balance of loud and angry searing punk and calming, dancey grooves, from the Rapture-esque dance track “Robotok” to the pop-punk-meshed-with-new-wave-licks “Hot Rod” to the minimally rhythmic “Twisted Lips.” Fans of bands like the Epoxies and Vexers should definitely take note. (MG)

Thick Records, PO Box 220245, Chicago, IL 60622, www.thickrecords.com

New Harmony Indiana – Parlour Music, CD

New Harmony Indiana does make great parlour music: midtempo and eclectic with the occasional samba beat. But their vocalist's lulled baritone comes off more as a parody of Jonathan Richman than the mint-julep-drinking, Dean Martin kinda swagger that this album needs. Still, worth a spin at the next dinner party. (CC)

Box Office Poison Records, PO Box 2, Milwaukee, WI 53201

Nice Nice – Chrome, CD

I don't know what to think about this. Really weird funk- and dub-inspired instrumentals performed by a Portland two-piece. There is a heavy accent on rhythm here, but not too much else. It's a little too much on the artsy side for my liking. (TK)

Temporary Residence Records, PO Box 11390, Portland, OR 97211, www.temporaryresidence.com

Nightfist – The Epic, CDEP

Possibly de-funked, Nightfist is an instrumental prog/metal band that likes Yes, Dream Theater and faster metal bands. This is a corny record that kids at Berklee College of Music would love. The Epic is well done, synthesizers and all, but it's pretty lame—then again, I hate Dream Theater. (DM)

Temporary Residence Limited, PO Box 11390 Portland, OR 97211, www.temporaryresidence.com

Nocompliance – S/T, CD

Punk rock dudes with liberty spikes playing simple punk-rock songs. Their sound is like a lo-fi Epitaph band with gasoline vocals. This must be a compilation of a bunch of different recordings, because the sound changes between songs. Your run-of-the-mill punk release. (KM)

Self-released, PO Box 17396, Minneapolis, MN 55417, www.nocompliance.com

Northern Liberties – Easter Island, 7"

Guitar-grunge heavy indie rock that has some damn passion behind it. Two interesting songs that are guitar- and hypnotic-vocal heavy. (BC)

Worlddealer Records, PO Box 42728, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.worlddealerrecords.com

Notwist, The – Different Cars And Trains, CDEP

Mellow electronica loops and occasional vocals, c/o German native Markus Acher, saturate this short remix EP. The vocal/guitar sections on “Neon Golden (Console Remix)” sound like they were lifted from an early blues 78, but the track's background follows in the vein of experimental electrobeat ambience. Very cool. (EG)

Domino Record Co., PO Box 5666, New York, NY 10276, www.dominorecordco.com

Now It's Overhead – Fall Back Open, CD

At times calmly cataclysmic, Now It's Overhead dives into emotional territory with cool, patiently passionate songs. Some appeal to a romantic's aesthetic sensibilities (“Profile”), while others ooze of technical excellence. Andy Lemaster's resonant voice is at once sincere and conniving, perfectly complementing the dark frankness pervading the songs. (SP)

Saddle Creek Records, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE 68108-8554, www.saddle-creek.com

Nowik, William – Notes From The Underground, CD

Part worldesque music, part subversive elevator music and still enjoyable no less. It goes from folk-chill to semi-psychedelic quicker than you can say, “Holy NPR music!” Nowik takes his life experiences from his travels around the globe and refined them into this record. (AA)

Last Resort Records/self-released, www.nowik.com

Numskulls, The – Manifest Destiny, CD

Goofy and poppy dirt punk for the kids. It sounds all right, but I've heard it a bunch of times already. I'm sure they're nice guys and gal. (DM)

Average Day Productions, PO Box 20217, Worcester, MA 01602, www.averageday.org

00100 – Kila Kila Kila, CD

Yoshimi's (Boredoms, Free Kitten) latest side project 00100, brings the noise. The Japanese avant-garde goddess of ambient and surreal sounds proves an über-instrumentalist, handling everything from guitar and drums to Casiotone and trumpet. Here, she yields tracks of often epic proportions. (“Aster” weighs in at 15 minutes.) (EG)

Thrill Jockey Records, PO Box 08038, Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

On The Rise – Burning Inside, CD

On The Rise has members of Agnostic Front playing nicely produced, fast-paced hardcore. It has a bit of a polished sound, but it works because you can hear all the wonderful, and somewhat subtle, melodies. In a world of mediocre bands rocking this sound to death, these guys stand out. (KM)

Bridge Nine Records, PO Box 990052, Boston, MA 02199-0052, www.bridge9.com

On The Speakers – S/T, CDEP

Funny that a band named On The Speakers sounds so much like the Walkmen. This record is pretty solid all the way through, in the vein of Interpol, The Stills or Elephant—and slickly recorded, which enhances the sharp melodies and singer's sexy vocals. Dig it. (JG)

Self-released, www.onthespeakers.com

Organz / O'Deth My Child – split, 12"

The influence of black metal on both these bands is obvious. Organz is pretty straightforward metal with screamed vocals and lifted Lars

Ulrich drumbeats. O'Deth opts for a different angle by incorporating industrial elements—clanging steel drum beats and synthesizers—to set the more commanding, brooding mood on this split 12". (CC)

Calls & Correspondence Records, 235 Addison Road, Wood Dale, IL 60191

🔗 Orion – Songs For The Goddess, CD

Orion, vocalist and musician, creates exotic music with steady rhythms and feminine auras. The songs revolve around images of women or goddesses, particularly Aphrodite, Isis and other female figures that aren't generally considered to be goddesses, such as Magdalena and an Arabian Queen. Orion's romantic appreciation for women is immense. Consider “Her wizard mind and Christ-like touch” (from “Aphrodite”) and “Her Arabic thighs/ They circle and rise” (from “Arabian Queen”). His devotion to swirling and almost holy music pulses strongly throughout the album, and his lyrics read more like prayers than songs: “Magdalena the priestess of fire/ Blessed are all the gifts that you bring” (from “Magdalena”). *Songs For The Goddess* not only takes the listener on a journey where powerful women writhe and beckon, but it also imbeds the mood with an intense awe for Arabic culture with “Dance Of The Sufis” and the CD's altogether mideastern feel. (SP)

Shut Eye Records, www.shuteyrecords.com

Othermeniage – Imaginadium, CD

Moody and dark-sounding rock music that has an interesting experimental quality. The singer sounds monotone and tortured. Interesting lyrics. If you're feeling too happy or want something to complement your down mood, you might like this. (JG)

Luminal Records, 123 Luckie St., #1304, Atlanta, GA 30303, www.luminalrecords.com

🔗 Palast, Greg – Weapon Of Mass Instruction, CD

You wanna know what's more punk rock than mohawks and studded belts? This old white dude, Greg Palast. He's got more punk truisms shooting out of his fingers than your Fender Strat. He's a journalist, you see, and not one of those flunky infotainment reporters, either. His brand of journalism is so scathing that he has had to go abroad to be published in the mainstream UK publication *The Observer*. On this CD, Palast speaks about some of his best investigative reporting with insights into which corporation is winning the war on terrorism; Florida Secretary of State, Katherine Harris', automated disenfranchiser; the Bush/Bin Laden secret handshake; and so much more ammunition to throw at all of your conservatron family members during those awkward holidays back home. At first listen you might even find yourself thinking, “Gee, is this a comedy record?” because some of the claims that Palast makes against our dear President Bush are just so outrageous and unbelievable that they cannot possibly be true. You can laugh all you want, but this shizzle is fo rizzle. And this CD is enhanced, too, so you can see with your own skeptical eyes what Palast is talking about via secret documents and disturbing photographs. (AA)

Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141-9092, www.alternativetentacles.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Jason Gooder (JG)

Public Enemy, It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back. In 1987 a rap group named Public Enemy created an album that was the antithesis of everything that was embraced in mainstream rap music. In the late '80s, most rap music had simplistic themes, a drum machine and usually just sampled one song. *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* was a wall of layered noise and revolutionary lyrics that drew inspiration from Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. It was to rap like punk rock was to the watered down mainstream rock music of 10 years earlier. The album opens with ominous air-raid sirens, and the samples seem to come from everywhere: speed metal, old funk and what sounds like the loop of a tea kettle whistling. Chuck D still has one of the all-time best rap voices, and Flavor Flav plays the surreal joker to his serious rap soldier. *It Takes A Nation Of Millions* cleared a path for later politically minded rap groups like The Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy. Unlike most rap from the late '80s, the album's sharp edge hasn't dulled with time. To quote Flavor Flav, “Who gives a fuck about a goddamn Grammy?”

What I've been listening to: V/A, *The History Of Portland Punk*; Red Hot Chili Peppers, *The Uplift Mofo Party Plan*; The Cinch, EP; Captain Beefheart, early songs off a box set; Public Enemy, *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*.



Pale, The - Gravity Gets Things Done, CD

Seattle has had a long history of pop bands, and since the grunge explosion has ended, they can come out from under the rocks. These 12 songs are catchy and will hold your attention. I like the keys and guitar interplay. (DI)

Sidecho Records, 1215 N. Red Gum St. Ste. 1, Anaheim, CA 92806, www.sidecho.com

Paper Chase, The - What Big Teeth You Have, CD single

Sinister, tightly timed, frenetic rock built on sharp guitar lines and urgent vocals. Heard it before, right? The Paper Chase make it their own, even on obscure covers (Roger Waters and Jacques Brel). But their upcoming LP will be a better indicator of whether their style is more trend than trademark. (CC)

Southern Records, PO Box 577375, Chicago, IL, www.southern.com

Passion - Sic Simper Tyrannis, CDEP

Pretty frantic metalcore that overflows with time changes and screaming. These guys even scream the definition of passion in the song "This Is What Defines Me." For what it is, this is really good and has pretty deep lyrics for this style of music. Too bad it's only six songs. (DM)

Watch The City Burn, 717 Brighton St. Philadelphia, PA 19111, www.watchthecityburn.com

Past State Hurricane - S/T, CDEP

I always wonder what it's like to be a drummer for one of those midtempo, shimmering, jangle-pop bands. With the emphasis on sounding sweet and ethereal, it must be really boring. Sympathy for the drummer aside, this debut isn't half bad and is full of inoffensive, mid-'90s Spinanes-ish stuff. You'll like it. (JG)

Dunket Records, Attn. Ghoy, 586 Sixth Ave., Apt. 6, Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.dunketrecords.com

Perfect Guy, The - Fo\$il Fuel Folk Hymnal, CD

These five songs are pretty depressing to listen to, partly because of the slow tempo, and partially because they go nowhere. They kinda sound like the Grifters or Jeff Buckley, but they will always be the opener. The acoustic guitar of "Opus 925" was really painful. (DI)

Self-released, 1867 Columbus Road, Cleveland OH 44113, www.thepperfectguy.org

Pilot Light, The - Et Les Ballons, CDEP

Melodic punk rock music by a couple of gold ol' boys from New England. Good clean fun clocking in at five songs with a standout tracks "Shotgun Wedding" and "Girl Go Boom Again." (AA)

Self-released, www.thepilotlightmusic.com

Pilot To Gunner - Get Saved, CD

In a word: *boo-yah*. PTG is back with guns blazing on these 11 tracks of rockin' post-punk bliss. Thanks in part to J. Robbins' masterful production, the band has never sounded better. A lot of bands minimize rock in the name of musical growth, but PTG finds a perfect balance by playing interesting parts that rock. Power saturates the songs, and when it's mixed with intelligent lyrics and great melodies, you really can't go wrong. Listen to "The Product" for proof. Singer Scott Padden's voice is a little hoarse at times, but it's hard to tell if that's just his style

or studio fatigue. Judging by their debut, *Games At High Speeds*, I'm guessing that's his thing. This record is a perfect follow-up to what *Games At High Speeds* led me to expect: a solid record from start to finish. Smart but not pretentious. Rockin' but not boring. Fans of the D.C. sound, Jawbox, Dischord, etc., should get this right away. Actually, everyone should get it, because it will no doubt be one of 2004's best. (KR)

Arena Rock Recording Company, 242 Wythe Ave., Studio 6, New York, NY 11271, www.arenarockrecordingco.com

Place Of Skulls - With Vision, CD

Ex-Pentagram guitarist Victor Griffin and Wino from the Obsessed make up a two guitars/vocals quartet doom-metal band on their first record together, *With Vision*. It's hard to differentiate between the two musicians because they've been following similar styles of music for the past 20 years. If you want to get into the meat and potatoes of it all, check out their own instrumentals entitled "In Rest" (VG), with its echoing guitar, pounding bass and loud snare drum and "Dissonant Dissident" (W), with its acoustic guitar and fuzzy, distorted guitar in the background. This record arrived one day after my back surgery, and with narcotic pain relievers leaving room for hallucinations and other psychotropic fantasies, the music was fitting for nightmares and waking up in the middle of the night in a heavy cold sweat. (DI)

Southern Lord Recording, PO Box 29167, Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.southernlord.com

Poster Children - No More Songs About Sleep And Fire, CD

The ninth album from the Poster Children combines energetic melodies, vigorous guitar-playing and a hint of new wave to make some sickeningly memorable pop rock songs. The disc also comes with an album-length commentary and a video for the song "Western Springs" that is oh so tongue-in-cheek. (AJA)

Hidden Agenda Records / Parasol, 303 W. Griggs St., Urbana, IL 61801, www.parasol.com

Postmodern Syndrome - Terraforming, CD

Progressive rock like Rush or Queensryche, this nü metal band presents a conceptual album full of coarse vocals and acoustic guitar interludes with the intensity of System of a Down. (DI)

Now or Never Records, 150 Bay St., Ste. 806, Jersey City, NJ 07302, www.noworneverrecords.com

Probot - S/T, CD

This isn't the first "solo" Dave Grohl record, which was called *Pocket-watch*, a Simple Machines cassette-only release. I never heard that cassette, but that's another story. Probot is a pre- and post-punk metal crossover mix circa '83-'85. Imagine the Rollins Memphis Three Benefit of Black Flag tunes multiplied by a power of infinity, and that is Probot. This is all Grohl playing most of the instruments and writing the songs with the vocalists from the likes of Venom, King Diamond, DRI and COC. This record is so deep it'll blow you out of the water. It's a 15-year-old boy's heavy metal wet dream that most posers of nü metal won't get. I can only imagine what the average Foo Fighters fan will think. This isn't a Meat Puppets tribute on *Unplugged*, but the most intense trib-

ute and rebirth one could ever await. Osborne has become a household name and cliché, but Black Sabbath was on to something. Many bastardizations later through the European flag barriers Celtic Frost, King Diamond, Venom and Motorhead are all here again to prove Nirvana didn't kill heavy metal. Leaving the obvious alone (Lemmy and Wino), the Max Cavallera track "Red War" is pretty heavy. (DI)

Southern Lord Recording, PO Box 29167, Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.southernlord.com

Purrs, The - S/T, CD

Take some great, clean and powerful garage-rock sounds (complete with the wondrously sex-charged sound of that low, fuzzed out bass) and add a good handful of 1960s girl-group vocal styles, and you get the Purrs. Shake in a few measures of pure girl-group melody for a better time. Simple, *loud*, cute, yet nasty—this is, by far, worth however much it may cost at your local record shop. The balance between tough-as-nails garage wall-of-sound and sweet girl-group pop aesthetics is absolutely perfect, as the sweet vocals in songs like "Got Kissed" and "Boys" is humorously overturned by the deliciously raunchy rock. This is what The Donnas could have been if they weren't so damn cheesy. (MG)

Garage Pop Records, PO Box 88003, Rochester, NY 14618, www.garagepoprecords.com

Put-Ons, The - Get Your Kicks, 7"

It's simple: two great attitude- and guitar-driven rock tunes (with vocals sounding like KISS' Ace Frehley) on one 7". It doesn't get any easier or better than this. (BC)

Puke N Vomit Records PO Box 3435 Fullerton, CA 92834, <http://members.cox.net/2toneunitybol/pnv/>

Rabdao, Sarah - Benevolent Apollo, CD

Sarah Rabdao has the voice of an angel, reminiscent of Everything But The Girl, Texas, Beth Orton and Dido. This Bostonite is at her best with smoldering electronic beats cascading beneath her voice. While the acoustic "85 Breezy" could be ignored, "So Many Millions" makes up for any blandness with soulful dexterity. (SP)

Self-released, www.sarahrabdao.com

Rauhouse, Jon - Steel Guitar Rodeo, CD

Jazzy, Texas swing style album by Bloodshot's resident steel-guitar hero. There's a nice mix of instrumentals (where Rauhouse really shows off his chops) and ballads, featuring collaborations with Kelly Hogan and Neko Case, who voices the unforgettable "River Of No Return." It'll give your punk rock ass a little high culture, Sid. (AJ)

Bloodshot Records, 3039 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60618, www.bloodshotrecords.com

Rectifiers, The - Wear The Weight Of The Resting Sky, CD

Eerie, melodic and trance-inducing work from six-piece Aussie outfit. The saw and chimes used throughout the album is what creates the ubiquitous spine chill, but the music, and vocals are also so gentle and beautiful it's hard not to get sucked in (yeah, even you punk). (EG)

Sensory Projects, 12/18 Silverdale Road, Ivanhoe Victoria, Australia, 3079, www.cavaliermusic.com/sensory-projects

Reviewer Spotlight: Dave Hofer (DH)

Rhythm Collision, Clobberer! I've struggled for years within myself as to whether it was this record or Zinks! *Bad Move Space Cadet* that wore the crown of pop-punk king, and I think that I've finally decided on this one. You know it's going to be good from the get-go with the drum fill and pressing drum beat, and you know you're hooked once you get to "Hippie Now" and its lyrical diatribe against a former punk turned granola-head. Recorded over the space of a few years and some different members, you can hear production differences, but it just makes me nostalgic of the days when a band recorded when they could afford it and gave their *album* time to grow (a nearly extinct art). *Clobberer!* is harmonious, snotty, fun all at the right times and never lacking in the general punk-rock feel. Lyrically, Harlan Margolis contemplates daily frustrations and the will to persevere over life's endless mediocrity. On "Happy As A Fucking Clam" he sings, "Got holes in my socks but shoes on my feet," and you just know that he does. With so many bands writing carbon-copy songs about the girl that got away, it's refreshing to hear about a band sing about the exhilarating stirring of one's heart when you meet someone cute, and you miss your single chance to hang out with him/her. That, and *Clobberer!* has a great song about quitting your job ("Too Long"). A perfect example of what punk rock should be all about.

What's up next to be played on my new Batman turntable mat (it looks like it should glow in the dark, but doesn't): Brutal Truth, *Sounds Of The Animal Kingdom*, Nastradamus, Slayer, *God Hates Us All*; Bob Dylan and The Band, *The Basement Tapes*; Oblivion, *Stop Thief*.

Red Pony Clock / Ryan Anderson / Elekibass / The Poison Control Center - Paisley & Twee, CD

This kooky four-way split features the sugary '60s folk-pop sound of its artists. The musicians all share similar tastes for humorous lyrics with childish, almost romper-room-like instrumentals. The effect is insubstantial but sunny. Goofy songs boast titles like "Magic Markers" and "Surprised Donkey." (SP)

BI-Fi Records, PO Box 1327, Ames, IA 50014, www.bifirecords.com

Regs, The - 1999, CDEP

Another NYC rock band jumps onto the Strokes' and Yeah Yeah Yeahs' coattails. But where there's at least something compelling or catchy about both of those bands, The Regs are just kind of boring. (JC)

Self-released, no contact info provided

Resplendent - III: Casket City Wolves, CDEP

This third and final EP in a series won't make you want to hear Resplendent's previous two. Their somber, electronic, ambient music is respectable enough, but the spoken-word vocal style and lyrics are self-indulgent and boring. However, its intimacy might actually be better as a performance piece than a recording. (CC)

Mixx Tape Ltd., 2144 W. Farragut Ave., Chicago, IL 60625, mixxtape@attbi.com

Retconned - Game Sounds, CD

This record's respectable experiments in song structure and in what defines an "aesthetically pleasing sound" should make up for the attitude-heavy vocal style and the bland, (literally) bleeping songs. But they don't. Although they do comprise good white noise for web surfing, in that conscious, pseudo-modern kind of way. (CC)

Stickfigure Records, PO Box 55462, Atlanta, GA 30308, www.stickfiguredistro.com

Reubens Accomplish - The Bull, The Balloon And The Family, CD

This Arizona band plays country-fied indie rock/pop that, at its best, reminds you of a band you can't remember. At its worst, it sounds dangerously close to Barenaked Ladies. The numerous instruments (banjo, pedal steel) are nice, but the cheese is always near—see the John Cougar-esque "America You Look Good." (KR)

Western Tread Recordings, PO Box 661, Tempe, AZ 85280, www.westerntread.com

Riptides, The / Vapids, The - split, CD

Just in case you were too young to really get into the Ramones or The Queers, these guys play that one-two-three-four fun punk rock just like 'em. A whopping 22 infectious songs in all from both outfits. (BC)

Goblin Records/self-released, www.theriptides.com

Robb Roy - Days of Pride & Hunger, CD

I firmly believe the four members of Robb Roy have never read *Punk Planet*. That's mostly supported by theories that Creed and Train haven't either. Maybe it's too much to assume, but their lacquered, main-vein pop is better suited for rags that put Clay Aiken on their covers. (SM)

Pure Recordings, PO Box 2358, Dearborn, MI 48123

Reviewer Spotlight: Don Irwin (DI)

Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn and Michael Brook, *Star Rise: Remixes*.

"Nusrat is my Elvis," said Jeff Buckley in *Live at SinE*, fighting words from a generation raised on Public Enemy's "Fight The Power." This 1998 remix album features the revisions and reworking of Kahn's two records with Michael Brook, *Night Song* and *Mustt Mustt* by the biggest names of the Asian electronica: Talvin Singh, Asian Dub Foundation, Joi, State Of Bengal and others. Kahn died in 1997 and had his biggest hit in America singing with Eddie Vedder on the *Dead Man Walking* or Peter Gabriel's *Passion* soundtracks, but he was an international icon from Pakistan in the Qawwali singing tradition. I can't understand what he is singing about, but the sounds are very relaxing. Kahn's songs usually last 15-20 minutes and include tablas and harmoniums, but his work with Michael Brook, a Canadian experimental guitarist, was compressed into shorter song cycles. Talvin Singh might be the most well known performer/DJ, but the ADF have a strong political and social ethic second to no one. A popular song not included on the *Star Rise* CD is the "Mustt Mustt" remix by Massive Attack, which is on Talvin Singh's chill-out disc *Back To Mine*. Question: How does the traditional singing style of Kahn mix with electronica remixes? Answer: One step in modern era and one step in deep the Qawwali tradition. I found the electronica/dance influence more interesting than the original Brook version, and it's more Bill Laswell "dub" than the acoustic new age stuff that Brook was trying to do.

On the turntable: Rancho Relaxo (ex-Hoover and ex-Oswego) and The Channels (ex-Burning Airlines and ex-Oswego) live; Unwound, 1999 France bootleg; Mali Lolo! *Stars of Mali*; and Dr. Bombay KUCI 88.9 webcast.

RunnAmucks - Of A Different Breed, CD

Horror punk that rocks the fuck out of your spleen, no joke. It sounds like it's out of the '80s, and it's good in a retro-punk/hxc way, like that Beastie Boys' *Agllo* EP or early Dischord. If it weren't late, I would be circle dancing in my bedroom. Awesome! (DM)

Six Weeks, 225 Lincoln Ave. Cotati, CA 94931, www.runnamucks.com

Sadaharu - Punishment In Hi-fi, CD

Refused's *The Shape Of Punk To Come* influenced more bands than I expected. This debut takes a driving, Jehu energy and filters it through the aforementioned Swede's take on The Nation of Ulysses' take on jazz rebellion. When this band matures, they'd be a contender in that sassy screamo genre. (VC)

Universal Warning Records, www.universalwarningrecords.com

Sanguine - Cyclone 6, CD

Six hard-rock ditties dominated by the high-octane vocalist who, despite his occasional soulful crooner moments, sounds for the most part like a *Sopranos* hitman come to exact some payback. The accompanying midtempo metal is full of anxiety and uncertainty, making it kind of intense. (DAL)

No Bear, NO! Records/self-released, PO Box 950026, Fort Tilden, NY 11695, www.sanguinemyc.com

Scarlet Letter, The - How Is Your Heart?, CD

On their debut full-length, The Scarlet Letter give us 25 tracks of thrashy, spazzed-out, all-over-the-place, screamy hardcore that never slows down. If you're only familiar with the split they've done with the Assistant, look now, look again. I can't pinpoint it, but something about these guys stands out and keeps you coming back. The lyrics are socio-political, complete with long explanations in the liner notes, which are always nice. Like a lot of newer hardcore bands, Scarlet Letter has metal-influenced, screamo-type parts and insane screaming, but a lot of the sound is rooted in '80s hardcore. Great hardcore record mixing the older and the new. (KM)

Black Matter, PO Box 666, Troy, NY 12181

Scars Of Tomorrow - Rope Tied To The Trigger, CD

This high-octane SoCal metalcore five-piece makes its Victory debut, maintaining its aggressive, growling vocals, occasional harmony and a storm of metal guitars, grinding bass and superhuman drumming. These guys take being pissed off to a new level. (EG)

Victory Records, 346 N. Justine, Ste. 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Serotonin - Future Anterior, CDEP

If you dig Piebald's first couple releases, this is definitely for you. A spastic and detailed punk/hardcore hybrid, as mathy as it is heart-drenchingly melodic. Off kilter vox transform into passionate screams over some of the most intricate, pounding guitar work and crazy time signatures I've ever heard. Fantastic. (MG)

Bifocal Media, PO Box 50106, Raleigh, NC 27650, www.bifocalmedia.com

Reruns: new reissues from punk's past.

Cadavers, The - S/T, 7"

Beach- (as opposed to surf-) punk. This is the second side of a very limited demo tape from 1993. Three members went on to the Bodies. (RR)

Radio Records, PO Box 1452, Sonoma, CA 95476, www.vom.com/~radio77/index.htm

Freeze, The - Land of the Lost/Rabid Reaction, CD

Here's a reissue of two classics from the best band on the legendary *Boston Not LA* comp. This is powerful, snotty, melodic & metallic HC circa '83-'85, and it holds up surprisingly well 20 years later. (JC)

Dr. Strange Records, PO Box 1088, Alta Loma CA 91701, www.drstrange.com

Garageland - Last Exit To Garageland, CD

This almost seems too contemporary for reissue. Originally released in 1997 at the nexus of the Brit-pop movement, Garageland sounds like many of its contemporaries, only thicker and richer. What's stunning is how much it sounds as though it influenced other, bigger bands, (The Strokes) while maintaining a unique, vibrant sound. (JG)

Foodchain Records, 8490 Sunset Blvd., Ste. 504, Hollywood, CA 90069, www.foodchainrecords.com

Green Day - 1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours, CD

Who's up for a trip down Memory Lane? Green Day were the pop-punk geeks who went on to superstardom, and this reissue reminds us of their saccharine roots. Truth be told, I could never listen to a Green Day record from start to finish until 1994's *Dookie*. How many songs about girls can you tolerate? Nevertheless, there are many gems here: "Going To Pasalacqua," "At The Library," "Green Day," "Only You," "409 In Your Coffemaker." Somewhat surprisingly, they don't sound dated; on the other hand (and *not* surprisingly), they sound infinitely better than today's Green Day knockoffs that appear on cheesy alt-rock stations and teen-movie soundtracks. For instance, vocals were always one of Green Day's strong points—Billie Joe and Mike Dirnt harmonize well—but this record doesn't smack of studio pitch-shifters. This enhanced CD was completely remastered by Bernie Grudman, and it features about 20 minutes of video and radio footage, flyers, lyric sheets, pictures and more. A limited edition of it will also come with a T-shirt and sticker pack. It will, no doubt, push this record over the 1 million selling mark, as it's sold more than 900,000 to date. Good stuff. Pick this up and remember the old days. (KR)

Lookout Records, 3264 Adeline St., Berkeley, CA 94703, www.lookoutrecords.com

Viktimzofociety - Wicked Rock Music Is Killing Our Children, CD

A reissue of Joey Vindictive's first band, this falls under the classic mid-'80s punk band that managed to put out their own record. Fun stuff for someone who dug the Meatmen at one time. (EA)

Test Productions, PO Box 66470, Chicago, IL 60666



Demo-lition Derby: CD-Rs

Avorza – S/T, CDR

This industrial band uses every sound, from an old blacksmith to Pac-Man. Bursts of growling surface suddenly. Lyrical diagnoses range from mild sadness to clinical depression. Makes me want to break something. (EG)
avorza@fastmail.fm

Balmai Brothers, The – Millions Of Women Can't Be Wrong, CDR

Many musical styles provide the backdrop for weird songs that sound like they're being sung by guys from Turkey or Istanbul. I don't understand what's going on, but it's somewhat enjoyable. (NS)
www.balmai.org

Black Velvet Band, The – S/T, CDR

Songs have a rockabilly foundation with a hint of Tejano music thrown in. A couple good rockin' jams, but most if it's kind of so-so. (AJ)
www.lazyboyrevolution.com

Bloodiest Night of My Life, The – S/T, CDR

Indie rock on Ritalin with a side of screamo, coming right up. (RR)
www.bloodiestnight.cjb.net

Bover Brigade – Hate The World, CDR

Catchy street punk from Sweden that will draw comparisons to any number of the '77-era bands and is an absolute blast to sing along to. (BN)
www.boverbrigade.com

Butchers Bill – Quick And Painful, CDR

I don't know about the quick part, but much of this cock rock/metal album lives up to the "painful" half of the album name. This is bar punk to the max, with droning vocals and lots of metallic crunch in the guitars. (AE)
butchersbill@yahoo.com

Eve's Revenge – When Feathers Fall, CDR

Bass-heavy, thrashy metal with a singer who is always screaming at the same pitch. Just another screamo band. This didn't do anything for me. (JG)
 725 E. 2nd St., Bloomington, IN 47401,
www.evesrevenge.com

Intelligent Knives – Neon Dub, CDR

Lots of echoey, steely guitars and far-out organs. It's the stuff lazy Sunday afternoons and late-night clambakes are made of, not that I'd know. (EG)
www.intelligentknives.com

Killed By The Bull – S/T, CDR

The best demo I have received in a long time. There are so many sounds and instruments, but it doesn't sound messy. Crafty musicians emulating that transition from pub-punk to new wave in the late '70s/early '80s. (EA)
www.killedbythebull.com

L-10 Project, The – Live At The Crooked Bar

"Two old school punks with Mohawks who play comedic acoustic songs and have an emo name." Yeah. A couple songs are slightly funny, but this is pretty much just for friends and open mics. (NS)
www.oilvejuicemusic.com

North Star Infinite – Ghosts That Hide Inside The Walls, CDR

North Star Infinite plays melodic rock complete with humming, ethereal-sounding guitars and Jeremy Enigk-esque vocals. The songs become a little monotonous after a while. I'd much rather listen to Sunny Day Real Estate. (AJA)
www.northstarinfinite.com

Scarred, The – Demo, CDR

Old school, late '70s-sounding punk rock. The band is tight, and there is some good guitar playing, but nothing in particular grabbed me about this. (JG)
 PO Box 2435 Anaheim, CA 92814, www.thescarred.com

Sheffield Drive – Who The Hell Loaded These Dice, Anyway?, CDR

Catchy emo kinda rock numbers from this new Texas band. Cool breakdowns and lyrical melodies over basic guitar strumming create a refreshing take on this kind of modern rock. Great debut! (BC)
www.sheffielddrive.com

Siclid – Trailer Metal, CDR

Grungy, sloppy, Pantera-type metal, the kind of stuff that'd be cool at a house party if you'd had enough booze. (AJ)
www.labidochromis.com

Sometimes Sober – Five Dollar Coaster, CDR

I bet these guys are hippies. These hippies made good, groove-oriented, punkish, postish rock. (RR)
Anoptimisticpenguin@yaho.com

Tramps Like Us – S/T, CDR

This three-song demo is a strong beginning for this band. It mixes elements of melodic skate punk and rocking punk rock with hXc crew back up vocals and the ability to entice different folks. A vocalist who can both sing and shout complements these Tramps. This recording is pretty tight and makes me want to break out the instructions to the circle dance for those who may have missed out in Punk 101. These guys either know their roots or know how to make some damn fine songs. Heaven forbid they should know how to do both (which they do). (DM)
www.trampslkeus.net

U.A.s, The – S/T, CDR

If you don't have enough local bands selling their poorly recorded demos for three bones, call The U.A.s. If they're in high school, then it's a great start. If not, shame on you. This is why we wonder if we should review demos. (EA)
 507 N. Boone St., #8, Johnson City, TN 37604

Uncle Bob Drives A Combine – Episode III The Journey Begins, CDR

One second it's electronic noise, the next it's screamy mathcore. One second it's rootsy acoustic music, the next it's screamy mathcore. One second it's... (RR)
www.ubdac.deadamerica.org

Von Eruption – All For You, CDR

Hailing from Nagaland, India, these young rockers throw out eight songs, ranging from old Van Halen numbers to some really cool Delta blues electronic raps. (DI)
<http://voneruption.juma.com>

Shivering, The – Brand The Lion's Mouth, 7"

It's a shame this is only two songs 'cause I've been hearing so much about these guys, and now I need more. The Shivering plays early '90s emotional hardcore. The guitar lines go from dissonant to melodic while the singer shouts his way through the song. (KM)
 Council Records, PO Box 220691, Chicago, IL 60622

Since The Flood – S/T, CDR

Trustkill-styled metalcore, lots of double bass and decent riffs and even a solo or two. They have that similar appeal of Integrity. Brutal, tough and fast, but with a sense of melody to hold onto. I can't say that I'm a big fan of this type of music, but these guys do it better than most. (NS)
 Ironclad, PO Box 1757, Wakefield, MA 01880, www.ironcladrecordings.com

Sixfinger – East Side All-Stars Play Hard, CDR

My hometown has a scene well after I left it to rot. SF plays some catchy punk rock like Lookout! circa the late '80s or early '90s. Melodic and catchy as hell, this CD is made even better by the shitty production. I actually like this a lot; these kids have a lot of heart and do what I wasn't able to in a scene that tends to turn its back on the kids. Sixfinger sounds kind of like early Saves The Day, but not so much Lifetime. These guys will get nothing but better. Keep it up! (DM)
 Rapsallion Records, PMB 227, 589 Hartford Road, New Britain, CT 06053, www.rapsallionrecords.com

Skare Tactic – Remember When, CDR

Mosh-core songs about revenge, being the last one standing or reflecting on what you once had were best done on Hatebreed's 1997 classic album *Satisfaction Is The Death Of Desire*. Assuming they've heard that record, one would think Skare Tactic wouldn't write discounted versions of those same songs. (DH)
 Thorp Records, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecs.com

Skulls, The / Texas Thieves – split, 7"

The Skulls are one of the original LA punk bands. I was fortunate enough to see them a couple of months ago with The Weirdos, and they kicked ass and showed how punk rock should be done. I like the lyrics of "Can Punk Rock Pay The Bills" and their side of this 7" is OK, but they are much better live. The Texas Thieves side was better: simple, tight punk rock with cool lyrics about the lives of abandoned cars and dying of stress. (JG)
 Dr. Strange Records, PO Box 1058, Alta Loma, CA 91701, www.drstrange.com

Slapshot – Digital Warfare, CDR

I have to say I like this album better than Slapshot's old stuff, except for *Sudden Death Overtime*. I generally preferred Boston hardcore bands when they turned rock over their "classic" albums, which I think were too simple and badly recorded. Now Slapshot has returned to their older days, but the songwriting and production are way better. It's still a little simple, but it's powerful and fast, the way hardcore was meant to be. Choke is still spitting his acid-gargled lyrics with even

Reviewer Spotlight: Ari Joffe (AJ)

Linton Kwesi Johnson, Dread Beat An' Blood. In 1978, Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ, for short) unleashed one of the most potent examples of music as a political weapon ever. Along with artists like Mutabaruka and Oku Onuora, LKJ's music was part of a subgenre of reggae known as "dub poetry." An extension of the free-form "toasting" style pioneered by Jamaican MCs like Big Youth, these poets took their written words and, essentially, rapped them over dubbed-out reggae rhythms. No one did it better than LKJ. After leaving his native Jamaica in the early '60s, Johnson moved to England and began writing poems detailing the harsh realities of life for Caribbean immigrants struggling to survive in the U.K. Two volumes of his poems were published in the early '70s before LKJ decided to take a stab at music. Backed by Dennis Bovell's awesomely talented dub band, LKJ chanted tales of police harassment, rioting in the streets and real life political prisoners over Bovell's "dread beats"—the darkest, most sinister rhythms retained from Africa. It's interesting to note that while most reggae entertainers at the time were growing their locks and proclaiming, "Jah! Rastafari!" Johnson never jumped aboard the Rasta train. His concerns were always more practical than religious, and repatriation was the last thing on his mind. "Come what may/ We are here to stay inna England/ Inna this here time!" he proclaimed. To those who sought to challenge the will of the people, he warned, "We have fist/ We have feet/ We carry dynamite in teeth." Word + Sound=Power.

Dread flash him locks and a weak heart drop: Big Youth, *Live At Reggae Sunsplash*; Black Uhuru, *Red*; Josey Wales, *Outlaw*; Scientist, *Scientist Rids The World Of The Evil Curse Of The Vampires*; Burning Spear, *Marcus Garvey's Ghost*.

more venom than the old days. There's nothing posi about songs like "Stupid Fucking Kids," "Had It With Unity" or "Kill Your Parents." And on "Spirit Of '81," he's at his most cantankerous, taking to task people who live in hardcore past, singing, "So I'm old and cranky/ at least I'm right/ the old days were great/ but move on." Ironic maybe, but I'm glad Choke and company are still here to remind us why hardcore was—and is—so great. (NS)

Bridge Nine, PO Box 990052, Boston, MA 02199-0052, www.bridge9.com

Sleazies, The – Trite Ditties And Meaningless Crap, CD

Funny punk with a nice shot of the band mooning you inside the disc booklet. Songs like "Gonna Operate On Myself" and "I Wanna Fuck Your Mom" will have you clapping along with a smile on your stupid face. (BC)

Pelado Records, 521 West Wilson C103, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, www.peladorecords.com

SledgeHC – Strong in My Hate, CDEP

Metalcore, gurgled vocals and more. Four songs of in-your-face hXc on that metal tip. (DM)

Bloody Tears Collective, www.bloodytearscollective.com

Smogtown – All Wiped Out, CD

A short while ago, after years of delaying the inevitable, Smogtown finally called it quits, leaving behind only the eight tracks that comprise this release, their TKO debut. Sitting on a fence between snotty punk and new wave-y demolition goodness (a la The Briefs), this swansong's a hell of a ride. (BN)

TKO Records, 3126 W. Cary St. 303 Richmond, VA 23221, www.tkorecords.com

Snakes And Music – Truisms, CD

Fronted by former Jazz June frontman Andrew Low, Snakes And Music play familiar-sounding, rockin' indie rock—familiar like Pavement, Archers Of Loaf, Built To Spill, etc. Even though the vocals are occasionally too dry, this is really good and catchy. *Truisms* is an engaging debut. (KR)

Universal Warning Records, 865 Main St., Royersford, PA 19468, www.universalwarningrecords.com

Some Action – S/T, CDEP

Pretty badass, high-octane garage rock here. Plenty of bands do this, but few do it well. Great raw recording with biting guitars and the vocals pushed into the red. Most importantly, Some Action write good songs. I just wish there were more than five of 'em on this EP. (JC)

Gigantic Music, 59 Franklin St., Suite #403, New York, NY 10013, www.giganticmusic.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Tim Kuehl (TK)

Hickey, S/T. Hickey is one of the best and most underrated punk bands of the '90s. I've been planning on running this release as my spotlight for about two years, but never got around to it until now. In October of 2002, punk rock lost a legend named Matty Luv. Matty was the song writer and guitarist of Hickey and a huge inspiration to the current Bay Area scene and countless other bands from everywhere. It is incredibly hard to describe the sound of Hickey, because it is so diverse. Most of the songs are dirty pop punk, but they have an edginess brought on by changing tempo and dynamics that most bands making this style of music fail to incorporate. This is such inspirational music. My favorite track has to be "California Redemption," in which Matty sings: "You don't need a doctor as much as you just need to be sick/ and have someone come over and bring you soup and tenderness." Matty has been in a few other bands in his day, all of which are documented on www.mattyluv.com. Almost all the Fuckboyz songs can be downloaded and are well worth it. Hickey also released a discography containing all of their comp and 7" tracks, but it is really hard to find. It was originally released on Poverty records, then on S.P.A.M. records after Poverty went under—S.P.A.M. followed shortly after. You will enjoy anything from Hickey you can get your hands on.

What you should have in common with Tim's record collection: *Sexy, Por Vida, The Horrible Odds, Underground, Modern Machines, Thwap, Sharp Knife/Queer Wulf split; A Boy And His Blob, Tape.*

Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Laidman (DAL)

Faith/Void split LP. I guess I'm kinda being greedy and slurping up a couple records for my classic pick this time around, but this is one of those iconic compilations that has been out for so long it has come to define these bands for me. Old school DC hardcore bands, Faith and Void released their split LP in 1982 (on, of course, Dischord). Faith featured Alec MacKaye, brother of Ian, who shows up as producer and background vocalist, along with other early Dischord heavyweights like Jeff Nelson. Faith isn't overly melodic, but once you get past the harsh contours there are some great moments that will stick with you forever, from the opening roar of "I'm gonna make society bleeeeed!" from "It's Time" to the great guitar line from "In The Black" that hooks you through mysterious, evocative lines like "I've come too far to go back/ I'm gonna find out what's in the black." And Void, well, Void is just smokin'. They created a stew of feedback, noodling, screams, thunderfast drumming, and just when the chaos started to drive you nuts, they would cut everything out except the rumble of the drums and their trademark high-pitched feedback. Vocally, Void is the yin to Faith's yang, blaring violence and misanthropy while Faith is more about introspection. I guess call it implosion vs. explosion, in the words and the music. The last seven songs are a Faith EP from 1983 called "Subject to Change," which is a little more melodic, but just as raw.

What's on now, you ask? *Transatlanticism* by Death Cab For Cutie; the Howard Dean scream speech techno remix; *Vs.* by Mission Of Burma; Challenger; Denali.

Some Kind Of Hate – Undisputed, CD

This debut full-length rocks the fuck out in all the hXc glory of yesteryear brought forward to the present day. The snarled vocals are evenly backed by the driving sounds of what punk rock is all about: standing strong for your beliefs. If you think these guys are a bit opinionated, it's because they call it like they see it. Say it loud, say it proud. It doesn't get much tougher than how these guys do it. Once again, this goes by too quickly—12 songs in 16 minutes. That's hXc for you. Boston represent! (DM)

Bridge Nine Records, PO Box 990052 Boston, MA 02199, www.bridge9.com

Southern Culture On The Skids – Mojo Box, CD

These rockabilly veterans do what they do best: playing rock 'n' roll that doesn't reach much beyond 1965 for its sound and feel. Strong tunes, great vocal harmonies and plenty of boogie. Good enough to please devotees, but not quite great enough to win them any new fans. (AJ)

Yep Roc Records, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515, www.yeproc.com

Southpaw – Trajectories, CD

Melodic, radio-ready pop rock, which isn't to say the U.K.-based band is altogether unoriginal—it has a few decent hooks. Lyrics are the glitch. Whatever they are trying to communicate comes out awkward, like poorly translated text. Either that, or they filled the otherwise good songs with futile rambles. (EG)

Boss Tuneage, PO Box 74, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG 19 2WB, UK, www.bosstuneage.com

Speeds, The – S/T, CDEP

The first song's intro on this four-track sampler could be a segue between scenes on *That '70s Show*. Everything changes from Thin Lizzy pop to ripping Clashy rock with vocalist J. Vega tearing the seams from the incredible "Ask Me If I Care." Don't sample tracks two through four. (SM)

Self-released, www.thespeeds.com

SPF 1000, Witch Hunt, CD

Trite, "spooky" music complete with harsh guitars (White Zombie) and gravelly vocals that remind of the roller-skating vocalist from Information Society. Each song worships the eeriness and splendor of "darkness." Lyrics go something like this: "I like my girls like I like my drugs" and "Dead, dead, dead... kill, kill, kill." (SP)

Dark Future Music, www.darkfuturemusic.com

Spirit Caravan – The Last Embrace, 2xCD

Each new wave of heavy bands always seems to fall into the same "music as sports" trap: heavier, faster or more technical than the bands before them. Usually the first things jettisoned are melody, groove and songwriting. Spirit Caravan managed to entirely avoid this old trap. Perhaps due to singer/guitarist Wino's long career in doom bands like the Obsessed and Saint Vitus, Spirit Caravan made groove and melody as much a focus as bone-rattling heaviness and lead-guitar shredding. This two-disc set serves as the short-lived band's epitaph, pulling songs from both of the band's full-lengths, singles, as well as several previously unreleased songs. (RR)

Meteor City, PO Box 40322, Albuquerque, NM 87196, www.meteorcity.com

Stampin' Ground / North Side Kings – Allied Forces, split CD

Each of these hardcore bands do six silly covers of classic '80s songs by bands like S.O.D., Cro-Mags and Agnostic Front. Stampin' Ground are from the UK and have a big metal influence, and North Side Kings are from the U.S. and are more of a straight hardcore band. (AE)

Thorp Records, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Stand & Fight – S/T, CDEP

Six wonderful sXe songs on this EP with an additional six special bonus demo cuts from Wrench, ex-10 Yard Fight and his fresh batch of old school OCHC cohorts. (DI)

Bridge Nine Records, PO Box 990052, Boston MA 02199-0052, www.bridge9.com

Start, The – Death Via Satellite, CD

Well done, punky goth-rock with moody synthesizers, cool guitar riffs and a charismatic, breathy vocalist with an awesome rock 'n' roll name (Aimee Echo). They have an accessible sound—could they be bound for stardom? They also sound like the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, who I hear are very big right now. (DAL)

Nitro Records, 7071 Warner Ave., Suite F736, Huntington Beach, CA 92674, www.nitrorecords.com

State Control – No Escape, CD

Total '80s UK hardcore punk; they even cover of Discharge's "Ain't No Feeble Bastard." The shortness of the songs makes this disc enjoyable—any longer and you'd get burned out. Fans of the UK hardcore sound should definitely pick this up along with others from Boston's Rodent Popsicle Records. (EA)

Rodent Popsicle Records, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

**Straitjacket – The Loudest Voice, 7"**

This band has a late '70s/early '80s punk thing going, and the singer almost sounds British—must be from listening to Buzzcocks records. They sound similar to bands from that era (Buzzcocks, the Vibrators), but manage to carve out their own sound. It's poppy, but still packs a punch. (JJG)

Dead Rock Records, PO Box 42301, Portland, OR 97242

Stunt doubles – Perfection Through Destruction, CD

Pretty basic hardcore with sprinkle of '80s metal influence. Some of the metal riffs sound like Megadeth or (old) Metallica. This band might be awesome if they ditched the hardcore part and had a singer who sang like the guy from Judas Priest. (KM)

Self-released, www.stunt doublesmusic.com

Sugarplum Fairies – Introspective Raincoat Student Music, CD

A very polished record of quiet, slowly paced alternative rock with breathy female vocals and lyrics centered on wrecked relationships and loneliness. A record suitable as the soundtrack for the artsy, intellectual loner getting dumped by her "sensitive" hipster boyfriend who's really been a hound all along. (AJA)

Starfish Records, starfish@earthlink.net

Suppression / Atomatron – split, 7"

Suppression sounds like one part Locust and three parts Lightning Bolt (even with the duo effect), but not as good—a little slower-paced and less spastic with some spacey, noisy guitar effects. Atomatron is like a weirder Arab On Radar (if that's possible) with creepily sassy vocals. (MG)

C.N.P. Records, PO Box 14555, Richmond, VA 23211

Texas Thieves – Forced Vacation, CD

Unless I have been totally tricked, the singer of Texas Thieves is Lance from J Church. I heard the first five seconds and logged on to their website and found from the pictures that this isn't Lance singing. The Texas Thieves don't sound like J Church, but due to the vocal inflections and patterns, I still feel like I am being tricked. This is really good stuff. Pop songs that sound like something new and make me want to listen over and over. It is about time someone took this genre and put something out that made me take some notice. The production has some great stereo separation that made me realize how flat and crapy-sounding the last disc I listened to was. (EA)

Super Speedway, 108 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA 95113, www.supersm.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Krystle Miller (KM)

The Breeders, Last Splash. A couple of months ago, I was watching some show on VH1 about "one-hit wonders," and when The Breeders came on the screen, I felt offended. Their one early-'90s hit, "Cannonball," is one of my least favorite songs by the band, and, in my opinion, doesn't do their second album, *Last Splash*, any justice. From the opening notes of "New Year" to the last riff on "Roi (Reprise)," this album is nothing short of a classic. The riffs are catchy and the vocal melodies are lush, with sassy lyrics ("If you're so special why aren't you dead?") and pop-sensibility to boot. Twin sisters Kim and Kelley Deal wrote real rock songs with smart lyrics. I don't know which ladies are hot in today's mainstream rock circus (Michelle Branch, that new creepy version of Liz Phair), but a few years ago the Deal sisters wrote songs a girl could be proud of. I'm sure everyone is familiar with this album, but if you're not and you like to rock, *Last Splash* is not hard to find in your local used CD store and would certainly be worth the \$6 price tag.

On my (broken) turntable: Belle and Sebastian, *If You're Feeling Sinister*; Circle Takes The Square, *As The Roots Unda*; The Spirit of Versailles, *Discography*; Wolves / Ampere – split, 7"; Travis, *The Man Who*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Sean Moeller (SM)

Chixdiggit, S/T. If you've never heard the story about how Chixdiggit started, let me explain because it's half of this Canadian band's appeal. The four members began selling "Chixdiggit" T-shirts around their high school before they ever were a band. They used the money to buy instruments, which they then had to learn to play to bring to life the moniker on the poly/cotton blends they'd peddled. The songs on their first record were rough and humble, but this collection of tunes about the opinions of lead singer K.J. Jansen's mother on subjects like Henry Rollins' fun factor and his lady friends is the first of three straight albums that should be required listening. A grab bag of four chords—tops—finding different combinations to deliver rousing beer anthems like "I Wanna Hump You" and "Stacked Like That," a 20-second bit about the sexual possibilities that could blossom with the help of some firmer biceps and delts. All this typing has got me thinking that Chixdiggit were the shadowy bangers who unknowingly plowed the way for the American success of The Darkness (maybe it's not quite success yet). Well, Chixdiggit at least laid a suit jacket over the Atlantic, so The Darkness wouldn't get the bottoms of their trousers soppy. Could it be that "I Drove The Coquihalla" was the grandfather to "I Believe in A Thing Called Love"? It doesn't seem so absurd to me now that I think about it.

The records that have been circling: The Unicorns, *Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone?*; Rufus Wainwright, *Want One*; The Muppet Show, *25th Anniversary Collection*; Volcano, *I'm Still Excited!!*, S/T; TV On The Radio, *Desperate Youth, Blood Thirsty Babes*; Steve Poltz, *Chinese Vacation*; Fizzle Like A Flood, *S/T EP*.

Thank God For Astronauts – Take It Tough, 7"

Hey something on a single that isn't crust or street punk. What a surprise; I didn't realize that indie-punk Radiohead fans had turntables. This stuck out among the sea of crap this month as a well-written pop single worth my time. (EA)

Best Friends Records, PO Box 48214, Denver, CO 80204

The-Front – S/T, CD

Early '80s style punk featuring driving guitars and snotty female vocals with equal parts rage and melody. It blows away any girl-fronted bands in recent memory. "911," "Be Your Girl" and "Bloody Ink" will make a fan out of the most jaded punks. The Distillers who? (BN)

Self-released, PO Box 883, Casper, WY 82601, www.the-front.net

This Night Creepy – S/T, CD

This is next-level emo. "Next level" in that it tricks you into thinking it's just another hardcore band and then—POW!—you're in the middle of one of those little emo boy breakdowns. Full of lots of hard and soft spots—well done, but you know the drill by now. (JG)

1157 Records, PO Box 5138, Wellesley St, Auckland, New Zealand, www.elevenfiftyseven.com

Thought Riot – Sketches of Undying Will

Thought Riot stands out from the pack of today's melodic hardcore bands by focusing more on hardcore than melody. They impressed me live, but this recording is even more striking. They're from Modesto, Calif., and this is their second release on A-F. They're a five-piece (four male, one female) that has a full sound through the use of a second guitar. Unlike many bands with second guitars, they don't overuse "lead" guitar lines. The lyrics are well put together, and you can actually picture these young politicians checking out library books and reading publications other than music zines. Thought Riot is definitely a band to watch for when they come through your town, and this album is well worth seeking out. (AE)

A-F Records, PO Box 71266, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

Toasters, The – In Retrospect, CD

The Toasters' leadman and Moon Records founder Bucket saw the New York-based Moon store close in 2000, a veritable ska empire he built from the ground up. Last time I was out there, the storefront read "Ska was here." The Toasters are among ska bands that have proven ska was, is and will be here for years to come, and a "best of" comp, fans will agree, is long overdue. The band's sound is one that is instantly recognizable to ska fans, yet each release has had its own unique place in the

band's catalog. This isn't just a Johnny-come-lately ska outfit, either. Since 1981, the Manhattan-base band has carved out their own niche in ska history, with regional influences ranging from Kingston to London to New York. Like those who came before them, The Toasters have gone on to pave the way for the next generation of artists such as Chris Murray and King Django. The 70-minute release covers so much of the band's discography that there's only room for about one "best" song from each album. A best of album that spans 25 years' worth of work is a must-have among long-time fans and ska lovers. (EG)

STOMP Records, 78 Rachel East, Montreal, Quebec H2W 1C6, Canada, www.unionlabelgroup.com

Throwdown – Haymaker, CD

Rudimentary moshcore with redundant hardcore lyrics concerning hatred, weakness, pride, integrity, friendship, etc. Oh, and liberally sprinkle the f-word around there too. Floorpunching music for angry 14-year-olds. I can only hope that they're sXe so one day they'll eventually outgrow hardcore. (NS)

Trustkill, 23 Farm Edge La., Tinton Falls, NJ 07724, www.trustkill.com

Timber! – Circle The Wagons!, CDEP

Three songs of talented instrumental rock somewhere within the mathy, indie, post-hardcore realm. Imagine early '90s Dischord minus the vocals. Meandering rhythms, played cohesively, if that makes sense. Like most of the good instrumental stuff I hear, I appreciate the music, but miss the connection some lyrics could provide. (NS)

Reason Y, 747 Barnett St. NE, #4, Atlanta, GA 30306, www.reasony.com

Toxic Narcotic – Shoot People, Not Dope, CDEP

Now there's a political platform for you. Other progressive solutions for the World's ills include "People want to kill each other—get over it." When it's bellowed over ultra-tight, light-speed hardcore it somehow makes a lot more sense. The real surprise is the reggae/hardcore hybrid track. Seriously. (RR)

Rodent Popsicle Records, PO Box 1143 Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

Trans Am – Liberation, CD

Trans Am's first overtly political record, *Liberation* mines familiar sonic territory for the band while expanding ideologically. Fans will recognize the strains of new wave, heavy rock and electronica—like AC/DC vis à vis Kraftwerk—but the role of politics on this record is new territory. Check "Uninvited Guest," which uses a sound collage of George Bush to form an incredibly sinister speech. The record is of course

mostly instrumental, but the tension in the band's hometown of Washington, D.C., permeates everything. The band recorded *Liberation* in their own studio and left the window open while doing it, occasionally catching some noises from the outside world in the process. Like the band's other work, *Liberation* is hit or miss; it can go from powerful, synth-heavy rock ("Music For Dogs") to melodramatic electro-rock that makes you wonder if they're being ironic ("Total Information Awareness"). Trans Am tends to be a band that you like or you don't, and *Liberation* continues that dynamic. The fans will like it, and nonfans will wonder what all the fuss is about. (KR)

Thrill Jockey Records, PO Box 08038, Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

Trapist – Ballroom, CD

"Ambient" barely begins to describe it. This is what it sounds like when a rock band turns their equipment on and leaves the room. Every couple of minutes a drum is hit, or a chord is strummed. Trip out. (RR)

Thrill Jockey, PO Box 08038, Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

Tussle – Don't Stop, CDEP

If it's got a tight bass line, it's gonna make you shake your ass. And whoever the wiz is who makes you shake it, owns it—at least for those five minutes. Tussle is gonna own your ass. Their tainted, delicious, disco style is so damn straightforward, accessible and off-the-cuff that they're either bordering on musical genius or a bunch of lazy fuck-ups who stumbled onto something really hot. The core of it ain't rocket science: keep the bass and drums steady with old-fashioned instruments and the lo-fi electronic sound experiments to a maximized minimum. The addition of two remixes by Soft Pink Truth (Matmos/Bjork) and Stuart Argabright (Death Comet Crew) add the extra throb of techno, dazzle of dub and polish to the rough edges. Not that they needed it, but you can have it either way. So long as they have you. (CC)

Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow St., Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com

TV on the Radio – Desperate Youth, Bloodthirsty Babes, CD

After serving up one of the most compelling albums of last year with their EP *Young Liars*, I eagerly awaited TV on the Radio's first full-length release. I'm glad to report that I wasn't disappointed. Continuing where the EP left off, *Desperate Youth, Bloodthirsty Babes*, fills your speakers with TV on the Radio's signature aural soundscapes, the band's fuzzy, muddy loops creating an impenetrable sonic wall that props up the surprisingly melodic vocals. Not a band to retrace their

steps (though it was disappointing to see them repeat the best song from the EP, "Staring at the Sun" here on the album), TV on the Radio pushes their successful formula further on *Desperate Youth* with more complete instrumentations—soaring synth strings, unexpected horn lines, and basslines that reach through the murky loops to get your head bobbing. For me, music should be a never-retreating path into the future—TV on the Radio is one of the greats right now. (DS)

Touch & Go PO Box 25520 Chicago, IL 60622

1208 – Turn Of The Screw, CD

The SoCal sound permeates every song on this CD, pages taken from the book of Strung Out, Face To Face, Ten Foot Pole. There's nothing wrong with that, but there's nothing memorable, either. Actually, scratch that; you'll remember the lyrics because they're really cliché and cringe-inducing. (KR)

Epitaph Records, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Unicorns, The – Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone?, CD

The Unicorns off-kilter sense of humor and bizarre take on what constitutes a pop song has the potential to be annoying and frivolous. Instead, it's charming and infectious as hell. A good, hilarious record. Cheeky, ironic bullshit and all, "We're The Unicorns, and we're more than horses." (CC)

Alien8 Recordings, PO Box 666, Station R, Montreal, QC H2S 3L1, Canada, www.alien8recordings.com

Valient Thorr – Stranded On Earth, CD

This is a hit record with one flaw: Bands need to stay focused so that the rest of us with attention-deficit problems can find comfort. It's totally The Make Up with a speed-metal edge. I think they could still be really popular, but they have the same problems as the reggae-punk bands—should you slam dance or smoke pot? Valient Thorr's *Stranded On Earth* is an e-ticket ride at Disneyland. If some of these songs were just 7" singles, each person wanting to groove to soul or punk could all be happy. (DI)

Venge Records/self-released, www.valientthorr.com

Vapids, The – We Can't Do It, 7"

The b-side is a Groovie Ghoulies cover, which gives you an apt idea of what to expect from the original on the a-side: Ramones three-chord punk. Not bad, but nothing really sets them apart from the thousand other bands picking Joey & Dee Dee's bones. (JC)

Route 13 Recordings, 1109 Prospect Ave., Wilmington DE 19809

Varant Majarian / Abandon All Hope / The Subjects – split, CD

With 22 songs, this CD makes it tricky to catch what's going on, especially when Varant Majarian play more than half of them. Most of the songs are under a minute, and you need to read along with the lyrics. My one question with the very clever and hard-hitting lyrics is "What is dipity-do?" (DI)

Chicken-Head Records, PO Box 37147 Reseda, CA 91337, www.chickenheadrecords.com

Very Most, The – Making the Case For Me, CD

Catchy indie pop from Idaho. The Very Most is one dude with a guitar, a drum set, bass and keyboards, who roped some of his friends into playing. While it has sweet, well-written, well-versed, poppy songs, you've got to have a stomach for this, or you'll gag on its sugary melodies. (JG)

Coming In Second, 1823 S. Atlantic St., Boise, ID 83705, www.cominginsecond.com

Via Satellite – Aux Ed, CD

Think Small Brown Bike with more screaming and faster punk-rock parts, passionate without being a Hot Water Music knock-off. This also reminds me of the early '90s heyday, when bands like Cap'n Jazz and Texas Is The Reason ruled the "emo" scene. Really good stuff. (DH)

Ass-Card Records, Annenstr. 5, 44137 Dortmund, Germany, www.asscardrecords.com

Vindictives, The – Muzak For Robots, CD

Looks like Joey finally ran out of snotty and juvenile ideas, so he turned to "100% non-organic" instrumental/electronic music. Yes, it's different and may please the occasional Kraftwerk fan, but most listeners will find it rather tedious. While neat for Vindictives collectors, others should look for their earlier albums.

Teat Records, PO Box 66470, Chicago, IL 60666, www.thevindictives.com

Volcano, I'm Still Excited!!! – S/T, CD

This vintage Elvis Costello-sounding disc was recorded by a member of Mates Of State and is really well-produced, but leaves me bored. In the words of Choptank, "Elvis Costello Has No Soul," and now that he's some kind of jazz diva, don't look toward Elvis for inspiration. (DI)

Polyvinyl Records Co, PO Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826-7140, www.polyvinylrecords.com

Von Jugel – Room With A View, 7"

German electro-pop with a dark edge. The title track isn't actually as good as the A-side track "Macht, Geld, Und Der Mord," but I guess "Room With A View" just sounded better. (JG)

Ghost Arcade, www.ghostarcade.com

Reviewer Spotlight: (Mr.) Dana Morse (DM)

Clutch, Transnational Speedway League: Anthems, Anecdotes And Undeniable Truths. "Like a fly to doo doo/ you need me like a bird needs wings/ or little bunny fufu/ who needs to bop the field mice/ so all the kids can sing..." Such nonsense being spewed at the listener in a deadpan manner with such conviction cannot be denied in any way, shape or form. But when you add the toughest-sounding band creating the soundtrack to these tales about El Jefe, backwoods Shoguns, rats and monster trucks, you get the ultimate band. These guys knew how to rock it with their tuned down, Sabbath-influenced, Southern fried rock while taking what they needed from the punk and hXc community. Hell, the storytelling on this record definitely is the icing on the cake, because this record was perfect musically. But with the lies or truths being shouted at the listener, you can't help be dragged in by this now-classic record. What makes this the best record to come out of the early '90s? I don't know for sure, but Clutch can't even touch this record or even their second LP, *Escape From The Prison Planet*, which has a more of the *Planet Of The Apes* feel, instead of a perverted *Dukes Of Hazzard* feel like *Transnational*. Clutch has a solid fan base, but not like when they first started. Strong out of the gate, then they just kind of stopped to wallow in their own filth. Oh well, they still have a career, I guess.

Hot for teacher this issue: Shudder To Think, *Voodoo* (reissue); The Notwist, *Neon Golden*; Lot Six, *Major Fables*; Fantomas; Division (reviewed this issue); Subtle, *Spring*; Mars Volta, *Live EP*; Wu-Tang Clan, *Curtis Mayfield*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Bart Niedziakowski (BN)

Crimpshrine, Duct Tape Soup. It's a shame that Crimpshrine came and went largely unnoticed on a national scale. Outside of the Bay Area, the band was rather obscure until long after its demise. Still, despite their rather limited influence (while still in existence) Crimpshrine records continue to sell surprisingly well, and their first pressings rake in big bucks on eBay. Crimpshrine was one of the few bands that sang songs worth singing and did so mostly to benefit others by sharing profits among a number of worthy recipients. Many of the songs dealt with abandonment, rape and social issues no other band wanted a part of. With Aaron Cometbus, Pete Rypins and Jeff Ott onboard, Crimpshrine was like a Gilman Street All-Star Band, though at that time hardly anyone knew it. What most impressed me about *Duct Tape Soup*, their finest moment, was the conviction in the writing and Jeff's vocals. I think that, to a small degree, they really believed that they could change the world with their music, and I'd like to think they did—albeit in a small, though no less important, way. Still, looking back on songs such as "Fucked Up Kid," "Pick Up The Pieces" and "Closed Doors, Closed Minds," I can't help but think that the effects of Crimpshrine's work are still being felt and will be for generations of punk rock kids to come.

Songs for broken hearts: Jawbreaker "Sluttering," Fifteen "No Tion," Rancid "Tropical London," Ducky Boys "Doin' Time," Pop Unknown "Writing It Down For You," Last Days Of April "Will The Violins Be Playing?"



Vortis - God Won't Bless America, CD

Vortis is a mess that works, very true to the spirit of punk. Mix political punk rock with reggae, dub, rap, country and funk, and you're hard-pressed to call it anything *but* punk. This was recorded live in the studio and sounds great. (RR)

Thick Records, PO Box 220245, Chicago, IL 60622, www.thickrecords.com

Western Addiction - Remember To Dismember, 7"

Raw, midpaced, street-style punk rock from these San Franciscans, which is a nice change of pace for Fat. Group vocals during all of the places that also happen to be the best singalong parts. Nicely done. (DH)

Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119, www.fatwreck.com

Whiskey & Co. - S/T, CD

A seemingly odd fit for No Idea, Whiskey & Co. play toe-tappin' alt-country like you'd find on Bloodshot. The songs focus on the usual: drinkin', hard livin' (track nine mentions smoking crack), broken hearts. Vocalist Kim Helm has a great voice that emphasizes the world-weary vulnerability of the lyrics. Great stuff. (KR)

No Idea Records, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604-4636, www.noidearecords.com

Winks, The - S/T, 7"

The cover of this single has some sexy punk-rock girls drinking beer and looking tough. *Rowrr!* The Winks are lead by singer Amanda Hugnkiss, and all of the ladies have equally ingenious monikers. Nice snotty vocals backed up by fairly standard old school punk. (JJG)

Super Secret Records, PO Box 1585, Austin, TX 78767, www.superscretrecords.com

Wolverine- Cold Light Of Monday CD

This mulletov cocktail is fired up with one part teeth-gritting nu-metal balladry, one part Trent Reznor meets *X-Files* electronic noodling and a little Dream Theater/Journey prog-schlock for good measure. Words cannot describe this clusterfuck of a release. Avoid at all costs! (PS)

Earache Records, Second Floor, 43 West 38th St., New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

V/A - Against Police Injustice: A Benefit Compilation, CD

This is what a comp should be: 25 bands that don't all share a label or similar style coming together nearly seamlessly. Some of the bands include Day Care Swindlers, Choking Victim, MDC, Impractical Cockpit, Anti-Flag, Against Me!, Nausea, Bouncing Souls and Conflict. All these songs are great, and there is a flow to the mix that works really well. To top it off, it's for a great cause. I mean, who wants police injustice? Check out the website. It looks like Ahmad Nelson has a long way before his legal fees are taken care

of. The money from the first pressing of 3,000 CDs is going to be donated to the Committee to Free Ahmad Nelson and to his legal-defense fund. (TK)

Non-commercial Records, www.ahmadnelson.com

V/A - Boxcars On First: An Alabama Compilation, CD

Another regional compilation. This one has bands playing folk, punk, indie, metal and everything in-between. A few of the songs on this are really good and make me think we're all missing out on some secret going down in the Deep South. It's only \$3 ppd. (KM)

Bent Rail Foundation, PO Box 2283, Birmingham, AL 35201, www.bentrail.com

V/A - Broadcast International, CD

This comp features two tracks from each of .5 Limey Records' six bands. Decent slow-ish emo stuff for the most part, which totally belies its slick packaging. (JG)

.5 Limey Records, no contact info provided

V/A - C.N.P. Records And Friends Present: Ear Candy!, CD

Noise, grindcore, grunge and straight-up punk bands share space on this excellent CDR compilation. Featuring Atomatron, Suppression, P.C.P. Roadblock and a bunch of other great lesser-known bands who still know how to play dirty rock 'n' roll and hurt people's ears. What? WHAT? (AJ)

C.N.P. Records, PO Box 14555, Richmond, VA 23221, www.cnprecs.com

V/A - Cherub Records Comp V2, CD

This 17-track compilation opens with a burner from Cougars, who prove what hardcore has been missing all these years really was horns and a synthesizer. There are a few clunkers, but overall really nice variety, including standout tracks by Times Ten, the Carlsonics and Forget Cassettes. (DAL)

Cherub Records, www.cherubrecords.com

V/A - Definitive Jux Presents 3, CD

First, it is really necessary to ruin every song with two prerecorded messages reminding me that the CD I'm listening to is a promo, out March 9th, 2004? The patience I was thanked for 26 times was wearing thin after 52 minutes. OK, Def Jux really impressed me with some great releases over the last few years: *Labor Days*, *I*, *Phantom* and *Fantastic Damage* (to name a few) all expanded on what one could call hip-hop; they were lyrical free-jazz in their own scummy New York way. You could bump them in your headphones with confidence, even. As far as 2004 goes, though, things are looking bleak. Aesop Rock's exclusive track is just as unimpressive as his newest full-length, while newcomers Despot, Hangar 18 and 4th Pyramid leave me cold. Pro-

Vortis / v/a Greaseball Melodrama

duction mastermind and label founder El-P shows up on cuts with Cage and Camutao (half of the equally disappointing SA Smash), but he sounds as if he'd rather be back in bed than in the studio. The Perceptionists' "Medical Assistance" was inspiring, though, as it's apparent Mr. Lif and Akrobatik really feel the old-school flavor and embrace it without irony. Allow the new recruits more time grow, and we can talk 2005. (DH)

Definitive Jux, 199 Lafayette St., Suite 3B, New York NY 10012, www.definitivejux.net

V/A - Doghouse 100, CD

This above-average compilation includes unreleased tracks from Gameface, The All-American Rejects and others, as well as previously released Doghouse songs. It's enhanced and includes three music videos. The band that impressed me the most is The Break, who defy the stereotypical sound this label is unfairly pigeonholed for. (AE)

Doghouse Records, PO Box 8946, Toledo, OH 43623, www.doghouserecords.com

V/A - Go-Kart Mp300 Raceway, 2xCD

Whether you support or oppose the digital music format, you're likely to find the RIAA's actions reprehensible. Here is a group suing people on behalf of the likes of Sony, Warner Brothers and RCA for downloading music. What's next? Suing people for making mix-tapes? It's about time someone took the fight to them, and it's only fitting that it was a punk-rock label. Marketing it as "Go-Kart vs. the RIAA," the label hoped to draw attention but also to distance itself from the world of major-label politics. Kudos for that. Go-Kart also made available for download, free of charge, digital version of recently released full-length albums, becoming the first record label to do so. This double CD set is the first commercially sold collection of its kind, featuring 150 bands and 300 songs in MP3 format, playable on both PCs and Macs and also in the newer generation portable, home and car CD players that support the MP3 format. With so many bands and genres, from hardcore and emo to street and pop-punk, there is something here for everyone. Support Go-Kart and its roster of bands! They get it. (BN)

Go-Kart Records, PO Box 20, Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012, www.gokartrecords.com

V/A - Greaseball Melodrama, CD

I've liked every release on Gearhead Records, and this is no exception. Eric Davidson of New Bomb Turks fame selected these tracks, and here's a quote from the CD cover: "This is the sound of underbelly, square killer R'n'R, down in the gutter, lookin' at the stars. This is GREASEBALL MELODRAMA." Some of the sounds are dirty blues rock

Reviewer Spotlight: Sonia Pereira (SP)

Cowboy Junkies, The Trinity Session. Recorded in an old church, this seminal Cowboy Junkies album cuts right to the core of what soulful, haunting music should sound like. The acoustics are amazing (I guess in a cavernous church that's not too hard to snag), and Margo Timmins' celestial voice is full of body. Most of the tracks are songs you already know like "Blue Moon Revisited (Song For Elvis)," an improvisation on the classic "Blue Moon" (somehow they make this sad song even more happy-defying and whiskey-drunk). The opening track, "Mining For Gold," opens the album on the right note with its eerie and proud, traditional lyrics about getting black lung from working in the mines for the "shift boss." Romance isn't lost on this album either: "Misguided Angel" might just be the anthem for any woman who has loved a dark, brooding guy who probably isn't too good for them. And Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" is performed as if Timmins wrote it herself while walking by some lonely bayou near a crying whippoorwill. Speaking of walking (and country legends), let's not forget the brilliant cover of "Walking After Midnight." Ms. Cline would surely raise her fist in admirable salute. For the rock and rollers, "Sweet Jane" can't be beat. And though I would never blaspheme by insisting that this number from the *Natural Born Killers* soundtrack is better than the original, it still blows the socks off of any other Velvet cover (yes, including REM's atrocious "Pale Blue Eyes.")

Reviewer Spotlight: Rex Reason (RR)

Ice Cube, Death Certificate. Angry socio-political commentary set to music: if that's not "punk" (at least in spirit), not much is. I'm not about to call Ice Cube a punk, though—I'd rather live. Prior to his career as an actor, Ice Cube created this political/protest music classic. *Death Certificate* is a concept album of sorts with the two sides labeled as the Death Side (a mirror image of where the black community is) and the Life Side (where the black community needs to go). If you squint and cock your head to one side, the songs fit within those two categories. While the album is peppered with racism, misogyny and violence, the message is of crystal clear purpose and justified outrage. Ice Cube was never this angry or powerful before or after.

Five "punk" rap records: NWA, *Straight Outta Compton*; Paris, *The Devil Made Me Do It*; Public Enemy, *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*; Ice-T, *O.G. Original Gangster*; X-Clan, *To the East, Blackwards*.

and '70s punk (Real Kids and The Saints type), and the songs brought to mind old Rolling Stones and T. Rex. There is also a sticker on the front that says "CHEAP," so this comp might not break the bank. Even at full admission price it would be a good deal. On a trivial note, I was in one of these bands at one time. *That close to fame and fortune.* (Hi Matt!) (JJG)

Gearhead Records, PO Box 421219, San Francisco, CA 941219, www.gearheadrecords.com

V/A - H.O.M.E., A Gainesville Benefit For The Homeless Outreach Mobile Effort, 2xCD

Benefit comps are the best, not only because they are they dotted with hordes of fresh, young bands, but because they're down with progress. *H.O.M.E.* is no exception. This benefit supports Gainesville-based H.O.M.E Van, a nonprofit that travels to relieve the area's hungry and homeless. Featured here are two CDs' worth of everything from straight-up punk (Nuclear Cocktail Party) to hip hop (Headcrakaz) to folk (Amanda Garrigues) to alt-country (Hoyt And The Hotheads). This is especially intriguing for those unfamiliar with the area's flourishing music scene. Plus, it's roughly 194 a song, and it goes toward a good cause—not bad. (EG)

Signal Path Records, PO Box 14747, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.signalpathrecords.com

V/A - Mali Lolo! - Stars Of Mali, CD

Visitors to Washington, D.C., were blessed this past summer with the annual Folklife festival on the National Mall because it featured the music and culture of Mali. This CD includes some of those who made the journey to the U.S. *Mali Lolo!* is a diverse collection of West African pop music and some American Delta Blues, sung in several different Malian languages. Ali Farka Toure, the most famous Malian singer/guitarist, has a song on the CD, but one of the highlights here includes the Les Escrocs song "Pirates," which addresses the music industry in Mali and the social and political concerns that effect musicians in this poor country. (DI)

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 750 9th Street, NW, Suite 4100, Washington, DC 20560-0953, www.folkways.si.edu

V/A - Maybe Chicago?, CD

A fucking excellent compilation showcasing Chicago's burgeoning garage-punk/r'n'r scene. Each band's contribution was recorded in their own practice space, giving the tracks a great raw and personal

feel. This easily parallels with the garage underground in Chicago; that oddly charming, raw, energetic, sloppy, fucked up, we-don't-give-a-shit attitude is what the city is really about. It's about time the Windy City gets its place in the grand tradition of classic punk comps, without (thank God) having anything to do with what Chicago is known best for: pretentious, "post-this, post-that nothingness" (as Brian Costello writes in the liner notes). Twenty-four tracks, each one is a great, primal recording. Bands featured include: Functional Blackouts, Tyrades, Hot Machines, Baseball Furies, Manhandlers, Phantom 3, Ponys and The White Outs. Also, standout tracks from up-and-comers VeeDee (who simply and thoughtfully take basic three-chord punk, blues-tinged r'n'r and '60s garage psych to new heights) and Twat Vibe. (These ladies turn the whole Riot Grrrl aesthetic on its head with their beer-tinged sexuality.) There is seriously something for everyone here. Yes, Chicago! (MG)

Protomersh Recs, 2432 W. Cortez, JR, Chicago, IL 60622 / Criminal IQ Recs, 3540 N. Southport, Chicago IL 60657, www.criminaliq.com

V/A - Rocky Horror Punk Rock Show, CD

It's the inevitable punk rock track-for-track cover of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* soundtrack. As with any project like this, it's a mixed bag, but that won't matter to fans of Alkaline Trio, The Ataris and the movie/phenomenon itself, who will buy it regardless. (JC)

Springman Records, PO Box 2043, Cupertino CA 95015-2043, www.springmanrecords.com

V/A - Songs Of Freedom And Joy: A Saturday Compilation, CD

OK, so this comp was put together by a guy named Joseph Larkin, who apparently used to self-mutilate. He started an online support group for other cutters called Saturday, and the contributions on this record are from many of the kids who were involved in the community. The record was put out by a label called Also Ran, who says its purpose is to "increase faith in the hearts of growing Christians." That's confusing when it's juxtaposed by some of the things on Joseph's site, like a porno-type shot of a woman in a submissive pose giving a blow job. Also, the stuff on this comp includes things like flute and recorder solos, and spoken word and a cover of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama." All in all, it's a great idea, but a strange execution. I'm not

sure what to think about Joseph Larkin and his now-defunct online community, but if you are a cutter and want help, you should check out www.selfinjury.com. (JG)

Also-Ran Records, 144 Willow Wood Drive, Slidell, LA 70461, www.also-ran.com

V/A - Soundtracks For Kisses, Trips, And Fits: A Future Appletree Compilation, CD

The bands on this compilation do not redeem its god-awful title. Composed of indie rockers, indie-poppers and a solo endeavor, it's a lot of the songs that sound very much alike. Altogether, this comp drones on and makes me very sleepy. (AJA)

Future Appletree Records, PO Box 191, Davenport, IA 52808, www.futureappletree.com

V/A - Tribute To Enuff Znuft, CD

Chicago's favorite glam-metal band that never hit it big finally gets a CD in its honor. These lads knew how to write great rock tunes, and these 15 indie-rock bands (Dim, Receiver, The Roteers) do them all justice. Even if you don't like Enuff Znuft, you will still love this! (BC)

CD Smash Records 109 Poe Ave, Poteau, OK 74953, www.cdsmashrecords.com

V/A - Weird Fiction Horror Comp, CD

Horror/science-fiction themed comp with gory contributions from: Order Of The Fly, Von Dooms, Penis Flytrap, Monster A Go Go and more. I've never heard of any of these bands, but their names are hilarious, and so is this comp, with songs about everything from double features to Satan's penis. (MG)

Valiant Death Records, 22543 James River Drive, Carrollton, VA 23314, www.valiantdeath.com

V/A - Wellspring: A Benefit For Bread For The City, CD

Bread for the City provides social services in DC to the needy, and they are well served by this mellow compilation. Standout tracks include Bettie Serveert's swelling "Have A Heart" and the heartbreaking "So Easy" by The 'mericans. Nine of 12 tracks are previously unreleased and all will continue in my rotation. (AA)

Sonic Boomerang Records, 11200 Markwood Dr., Silver Spring, MD 20902, www.sonicboomerangrecords.com

Hey, we want your records:

Punk Planet 4229 N. Honore Chicago IL 60613

Reviewer Spotlight: Kyle Ryan (KR)

Schlong, The Essential. Perhaps best known *Punk Side Story*, their reworking of *West Side Story*, Schlong was one of the more bizarre punk bands of the '90s. How so? I don't know where to begin. There are 37 tracks on this release, and they cover a variety of styles, sounds and, uh, wackiness. This may sound terrible, but bear with me. The heavy rock of "The Trilogy" repeatedly breaks into hoe-down parts or almost mathy hard core. That goes straight into the Carpenters cover "Rainy Days And Mondays." The song "Ar surfing" follows, a surf number that breaks into balls-out hardcore on a dime. After that is the awesome punk track "Shattered Life," which was on the *Cinema Beerté* back in the day. Down the line are "Shit For Brains" (featuring the lyrics "I've got shit for brains/ kick me in the head and you've got scrambled eggs"), "Don't Mind Me I've Got Jock Itch" and "It Sucks To Be Fucked By Jesus." Along the way are strange samples, noises, instruments. It's really bizarre, and like some other very strange bands, Schlong can actually play really well. They're amazingly tight considering the nearly-impossible shit they pull. Their songs are trainwrecks of different styles and genres, and they're all about two minutes long. The record's pretty short considering it has 37 tracks, but it's not for everyone. Fans of Mr. Bungle, Ipecac Records and that bizarro scene would definitely be into it. I still recommend everybody check them out though, if for no other reason than to hear the madness once.

In the changer: Pilot To Gunner, *Get Saved* (reviewed this issue); Now It's Overhead, *Fall Back Open*; Screeching Weasel, *Kill The Musicians*; Weston, *Got Beat Up*; Mission Of Burma, *Vs.*

Reviewer Spotlight: Neal Shah (NS)

MIA, Lost Boys. I've always had a fondness for melodic punk, which probably started with Agent Orange and Social Distortion, whose records were relatively easy to find. An overlooked band from the same region and with a similar SoCal punk sound was MIA. They actually started out in Las Vegas, but their sound was way more in tune with Southern California, so they relocated to that area. This CD compiles their early days, including their LP on Alternative Tentacles and the much sought-after split with Genocide. The extra material is probably my favorite, though. There are some live tracks, including a great Damned cover, some compilation tracks ("Turning Into What You Hate" and "Just A Dream"), which are two of my favorite MIA songs, and some demos for an album not featured here, *Notes From The Underground*. As for the music, think classic OC punk: melodic, buzzsaw guitars played at fast to midtempo speeds. Add to that a great singer with catchy lyrics that tackled a lot of social, personal and political topics. It's too bad that the word "pop" has such negative connotations in the punk world these days, because a lot of older bands were actually just playing a rougher and faster version of it. Agent Orange will always be my favorite melodic SoCal band, but these guys are a close second. Someone should really convince MIA to rerelease their last two albums, which are just as great, if not better, than the material here.

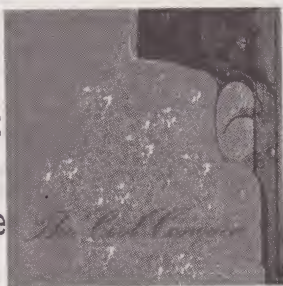
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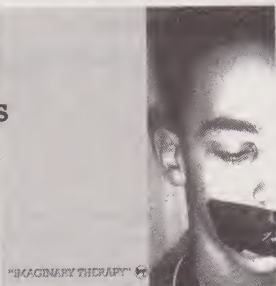
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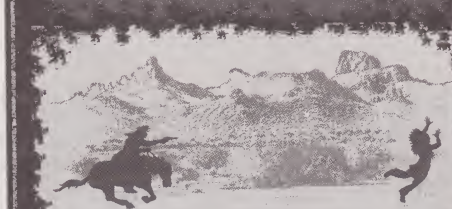
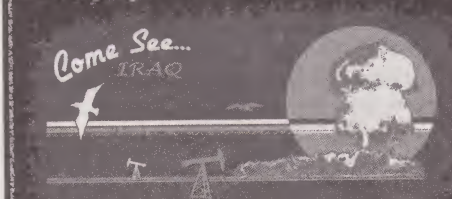
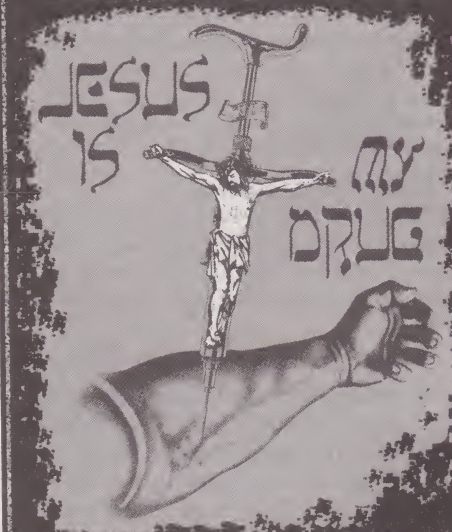
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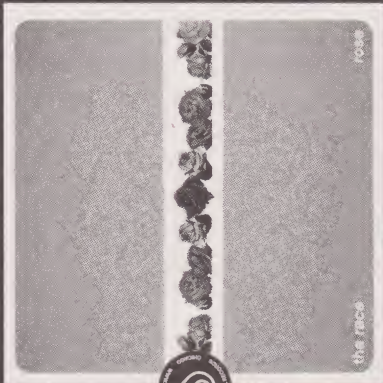
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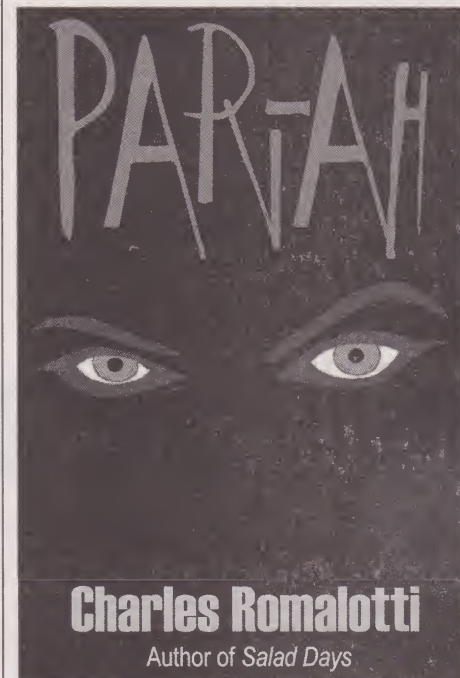
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Finally, a novel featuring believable punk characters! *Pariah* is an excellent underground horror story. Perfect for reading while huddled under the covers on a dark and stormy night. - *Maximum RockNRoll*

A creepy, tense thriller that combines punk DIY sensibility with a charming, hacky-pulp style. - *Roctober*

Nothing in *Pariah* is what it seems to be at first. I read this novel with clenched fists, gasping and shaking my head through every twist and turn. I got so caught up in reading this I felt lost when it ended. - *Fat City Magazine*

Typically with Romalotti, things aren't quite as clear as they initially appear. After a series of gripping incidents and interweaving plots, things are left perfectly balanced for an explosive climax. - *Scanner Magazine, UK*

Plain and simple, this book is a must, and you are a fool to ignore it, no matter who you are. - *B-Independent*

Combining elements of thriller, suspense, and horror, Romalotti weaves a tale that reads like punk rock nightmares. The complex interplays will have you suspecting what may come next, but never truly knowing. - *The House of Pain*

I felt I had a firm grasp on exactly what was coming.

However when the expected scene arrives, the mechanics of the situation and the complex interplay of multiple plots absolutely blows you away. Simply put, this book is awesome. - *Lethal Injection eZine*

After the first chapter, you think you have an idea of what is going to happen, but then at the end it takes a total turn. This book has a great ending!

- *Through These Eyes.net*

Romalotti has a real talent for writing. - *Adam, H2O*

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zines

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Abbie Amadio (AJA), Amy Adoyzie (AA), Joe Biel (JB), Vincent Chung (VC), Dan Laidman (DAL), Patrick Sayers (PS), Claire Sewell (CS).

Bad Bunny #2

I'm pretty sure this zine doesn't have a point, and, well, if you like pointless things, then this might be for you: a few goofy essays, wacky comics and record reviews. They also have a record label, but if this is any indication, then I'm a little scared. Maybe *that's* point! (CS)
\$1, Ben Shepard, 52 Strickland Lane, Ardmore, TN 38449, volcanovulture@yahoo.com

Bearing Edge #1

A zine about drummers by a drummer for the general public. It's mostly interviews with stick jockeys, and highlights include Brendan Canty (Fugazi, Rites Of Spring) and Mike Felumlee (Smoking Popes, Alkaline Trio). Isn't it about time that those crazy drummers get their props? (AA)
\$2, 62 Creekwood Square, Cincinnati, OH 45246

Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture #23

I've reviewed the past three issues of *Bitch*, and I don't know what else to say. It consistently contains reprints of particularly upsetting and inconsiderate ad campaigns, reflections on television programs and movies that are insulting to women, and articles about the cosmetics industry. It analyzes and demonstrates why these items should be important to feminists and talks about other recent news items. That work that *Bitch* provides is important; it articulates views contrary to the mainstream that are exciting to young people and easy to understand. With that said, this magazine is very entry-level and introductory, so I don't find reading it to be that challenging. (JB)
\$5, 1611 Telegraph Ave., Ste 515, Oakland, CA 94612, www.bitchmagazine.com

Black Velvet #37

Magazines that cover more mainstream fare like The Ataris are usually career "rock journalist" hype machines or 2) incoherent teen fanboys honed on LiveJournal. With a straight-forward approach and respectful criticism, Black Velvet's sharp writers cover these bands, but with rare intelligence. (VC)
\$6, 336 Birchfield Road, Wexham, Redditch, Worcs. B97 4NG, UK, www.blackvelvetmagazine.com

Broken Pencil #23

Hands down, *Broken Pencil* is one of the best sources for zine reviews and coverage on contemporary zine culture. Chock-full of in-depth reviews and articles, this Canadian zine makes our reviews section look like Danzig versus Paul Bunyan. (VC)
\$4.95, PO Box 203, Stn P, Toronto, ON, M5S 2S7, Canada, www.brokenpencil.com

Chainbreaker #3

Shelley is a female bike mechanic from New Orleans. She talks about her experiences with sexism in a male-dominated field and environment, and the writing is powerful and effective. There are two stories about

what it's like to be a woman working in a bike shop and the way that co-workers and customers treated her. This issue also contains many submissions like the one about the Great New Orleans Bike Delivery Race (by Ethan Clarke), thoughts on bike activism (Icki Apparatus), track bikes, bike maintenance (Scott Leapfrog) and more. The subjects are all handled in a well-thought manner with ample room for opposing thought and your own reflections. It leaves me feeling positive and excited to go ride my bike and think about its impact. (JB)

\$2, 621 North Rendon, New Orleans, LA 70119

Chairmen Of The Bored #13

Not to be overanalyzed, *C.O.B.* is cut-and-paste escapism from a few incarcerated punks. While a few of its pages take on a more serious tone, *C.O.B.* is a lewd and rude mix of haphazard comic strips and mad rants that's worth your time, provided you've got plenty to spare. (PS)
\$2 (free to prisoners), 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905

Chairmen Of The Bored #14

Inmate zines are incredibly trying, but this has an invigorating spirit to it. It's (C)rude, filled with girls and guns. The tone isn't "I'm educating myself to become a productive citizen," but a nihilistic "F.U. and when I bail, this motherfucker is gonna get it. Anarchy!" Holy shit. (VC)
Free to inmates, \$2 for others, Fanorama Society, 109 Arnold Avenue, Cranston, RI 02905, www.fanorama.tk

Chairmen of the Bored #15

A scrappy zine put together by the incarcerated containing short little snippets, thoughts and artwork. Nothing too deep or moving, but makes for good toilet reading. (JB)
\$2 or free to prisoners, 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905

CIA Makes Science Fiction Unexciting, The #2

OK, so you know AIDS is bad cooties. But did you know that there are documents floating around that show our government created a virus that reads just like AIDS on paper? Read this for more on this confidential history and present-day realities of AIDS. (AA)
\$1.50, Microcosm Publishing, PO Box 14332, Portland, OR 97293, www.microcosmpublishing.com

Coldhandsdeadheart #17

Heck a impressive artwork across 40 pages with minimal text accompaniment that reminds me of Derek Hess' style. I feel like many of the pieces are just begging to be reprinted in other formats. (JB)
\$2, Mike Twohig 72-1 Meadowfarm South, N. Chili, NY 14514

Comixville #8

This zine that reviews independent comics should win awards for their semiotics. Well-formatted with half the page dedicated the review and

the rest to a sample page from the comic, all it needs is to lose that Comic Sans typeface. This issue includes an interview with Ben Snakepit. (VC)
One stamp, PO Box 697, Portland, OR 97207

Crash

First, the tiny, strange fonts and contorted layouts make this tough to read. If you can decipher the words, you'll find a collection of lefty political pieces (mostly from other sources) along with interviews with Positive Force DC and the hip-hop group Northern State. The zine lacks a distinct voice. (DAL)

No price given, www.crashzineonline.net

Cryptic Slaughter #22

Giovanni's zine is a combination travel/per-zine and diary. It's wonderful and text-heavy with intermittent photos. In the first story, "Il Parco," he writes about talking to an old man in a park in Italy. He goes on to talk about what it's like being an American traveling abroad and how that reputation often precedes him. He closes with a piece written in Paris on Bastille Day. Giovanni's eye for recording all the details of the countries he travels to and the people he meets is fascinating. His talent for weaving visual details in and out of his essays so that they feel like modern-day fairy tales is marvelous—for they are beautiful, but he has not left out the very real, sometimes dismal, aspects of the cities and their class structures. Highly recommended. (CS)

No price given, Microcosm Publishing, PO Box 14332, Portland, OR 97293, www.microcosmpublishing.com

Cut Lip #1

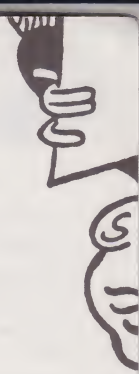
Sharp-looking zine filled with accounts of the author's many activist experiences, from attending the FTAA protests in Quebec to the OAS rallies in Detroit to evaluating individual activism. He also includes a travel diary of a trip gone sour, book reviews specifically dedicated to stories written about or by "hoboes," the discussion of protest tactics and living according to activist principles in the real world. Bob's essay on getting a real job after college, or rather not getting one, made me get up and write my own manifesto on the evils of capitalist society—very inspiring. (AJA)

\$1 + stamps/trade, Bob, PO Box 1379, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

Dagger #33

This Portland-based music zine features interviews with Jesse Malin of D-Generation, Britta Phillips of Luna and others. It has multiple review sections, each by a different person with a different style, but all showing deep knowledge of punk/indie music. Despite its nice newsprint format, though, the layout is very bland. (DAL)

\$3.50, c/o Tim Hinely, PO Box 820102, Portland, OR 97282-1102



Decades Of Confusion Feed The Insect #35

These Kafka-esque illustrations and descriptive poetry carry the gravitas of an empty piñata. I can't tell if it's melodramatic new age or post-Gaiman 20-something goth. There's plenty of decorative flourishes in the language and art, but it just slides off my brain like butter. I bet they talk in circles. (VC)

\$1, Justin Duerr, 218 Buckingham Place, Philadelphia, PA 19104, eulogycontact@hotmail.com

Die, The Vol.2, No.3

Interesting, informative, newsletter-like zine with articles on self-reliance vs. self-sufficiency, odd news clips from around the world, book and music reviews, etc. There are lots of things to ponder in these pages, like a section called "Whose Side Are They On," which critiques the war on terrorism this time. Good stuff. (CS)

No price given, Red Roach Press, PO Box 764, College Park, MD 20740, redroachpress@yahoo.com

☞ Dream Whip #13

Don't let the small print and tiny drawings fool you, because Bill writes big stories. Its unassuming quarter-size and hefty 186-page thickness will sit between your fingers challenging you to take a closer look between his fine print. Follow him from sour home Chicago all the way to Europe via an old-people cruise. Intermingled throughout are intricate, small drawings of the un-landmarks that he has visited and stick-figure-esque doodles of himself. But I can't really do this zine justice with this review, because the zine will do it so much better. What I'm saying is: Stop reading this shoddy analysis, and just go buy this sucka. (AA)

\$4, PO Box 53832, Lubbock, TX 79453

☞ Duluth's Dark Underbelly

How could you not fall in love with a zine whose opening line is "If you want to see the house where Bob Dylan grew up, go fuck yourself"? This is a brilliant piece of work that will amuse and fascinate Duluthians and outsiders alike. The first half is a look at the seamy history of the city, divided up into bits on topics like the bloodlust of Duluth's famous bridge, UFOs, crime, fluoridation, and labor. This isn't guidebook history, mind you. The editor writes: "This is the Duluth that's written between the lines, the places that are whispered about by children and mumbled about by old men ... This is for the Wobblies, the punks, the graffiti writers, the unemployed, the working class, the

people that glue our city together." The second half targets some wonderfully odd places like a store that sells dead animals, war artifacts and bones, a graffiti graveyard, and polluted Superfund sites. I loved reading this zine and highly recommend it. It made me want to hop the next freight train to Duluth, even though it ends with an exhortation for tourists not to come: "You will only find misery and pestilence, famine and Burger King." (DAL)

\$2/trade, Dang, 812 E. 10th St., Duluth, MN 55805

Fat City #7

Fat City features interviews with Warped Tour scorchers like The Transplants and Tsunami Bomb, GG Allin retrospective and a cover story on rock 'n' roll masseuse Dr. Dot. It's filled out with some black & white pinups and, I kid you not, Warped Tour trading cards. Not quite amazing. (PS)

\$4.50, Jay Hale, PO Box 120196, Boston, MA 02112, www.fatcityrockers.com

Folio #1

A goofy forum of art and literary works, old comic ad spoofs, fiction stories, funny letters and more from contributors. It creates the type of humor that doesn't make you laugh out loud. (JB)

\$1 or trade, 839 Ackerman, Syracuse, NY 13210

For The Reel #44

A dizzying layout with content that isn't much clearer. There's poetry, or perhaps personal mantras, amidst photography and collages. The zine's sole piece of coherent writing focuses on spirituality in relation to September 11th. *For The Reel* offers little more than a glimpse into a teenager's personal journal. (PS)

\$2, c/o Tracy Augustyn, PO Box 114, Bowmansville, NY 14026

From Brooklyn To Balata

Four activists travel to Jerusalem and document their accounts of the Palestinian struggle. The writers come to terms as witnesses of horrifying events, and their vivid descriptions candidly cover harrowing moments. While biased, it's never overtly sensationalistic or condescending—a common fault of political pamphlets. (VC)

\$3, Sean Sullivan, 128 Linden Blvd. #1, Brooklyn, NY 11226

Impact Press #48

Living up to its name, these leftist watchdogs shed needed light upon social and political issues while also featuring cartoons, music reviews

and other entertaining blurbs. This issue explores this year's Democratic race, harmful animal testing in laboratories and police-brutality cases in the U.S. (PS)

\$2, PO Box 361, 10151 University Blvd., Orlando, FL 32817, www.impactpress.com

Insurgente #5

Easily one of the most moving zines I've read in awhile. *Insurgente's* author, Alejandro, is a stunning wordsmith, capable of luring you into each piece, whether it's exploring the lack of positive Chicano film roles or his personal journeys as a writer, teacher and activist. *Insurgente* should not be overlooked. (PS)

\$2, Alejandro, PO Box 37105, San Antonio, TX 78237, insurgente@excite.com

In The Van

If you like guys in punk bands, if you like tour diaries done by guys in punk bands, if those bands include The Virus, SWAT, The Profits, Chrimson Ghosts, The Escaped, Kermit's Finger and tons of others, then this is right up your alley. (CS)

\$1, FMS Publishing, PO Box 1299, Boston, MA 02103, FMS_publishing@msn.com

It's OK To Be A Man: A Masculinist Coloring Book

What a hoot! Mr. Derek Erdman responds to all those kooky feminist coloring books with those nutty images of little girls being angry and stuff. My favorite features a young lad saying "I can go standing up or sitting down. It's my choice." Take that stick out from our bums and get coloring! (AA)

No price given, House of Hamburger, 1909 S. Halsted, Chicago, IL 60608, www.derekerdman.com

☞ Jinx Removing

What a let down! The writer promises so much in his quest to pioneer a DIY porn site and comes up with...nothing. I feel cheated. The kids want their porn—or at least some great stories as to why he fucked up, but there are none. Just a half-hearted sputter about the beauty of private relationships and how he basically chickened out. Phooey! This preview of an upcoming issue centers around the theme, "What Punk Rock Means to Us." Writing about punk experience to the outside world is like bragging about the camaraderie of your secret D&D club. That's why most academic papers on our subculture are painful reads. While a great effort in personal writing, it caters well to political punk-rock vernacular. The unsubtle dogma in our writer's actions

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the zines (or magazines) we receive, as long as they are released independently. However, despite our best efforts, not every zine ends up in here for a myriad of reasons. Records marked with a little eye (☞) are designated as "highlight" reviews by the reviewer. That means it's a zine that really stands out for them this time around, but just because a review doesn't have an eye doesn't mean it isn't good. Finally, if a reviewer doesn't like your zine, it's just one person's opinion, so don't freak out. We're sure you put a good deal of work into your project and that alone is worth some congratulations!



come off as condescending, especially from the eyes of an outsider. Reading from such a perspective, my first question is "What is it that makes this person better than me?" He's not. He's just a punk, and that doesn't make it seem any friendlier. (VC)

No price given, Arpad Crisis, 1246 W. Pratt, Apt. 1111, Chicago, IL 60626, jinxr3moving.tri-pod.com

Josh Hole #1

A split zine combining *Josh Sullivan Comics* and *Sink Hole*, two Florida-based zines. Interviews with bands like The Virus and The Ataris interspersed with short, interestingly drawn absurdist comics. A nice package. (DAL)

\$1/3 stamps/trade, Sink Hole, 2105 19th St. W., Bradenton, FL 34205

Junktown #4

Personal stories with literary leanings from a small-town punk transplanted to Denver. Being tormented in school, superhero trading cards and the coming apocalypse. Short but sweet. (JB)

\$1 or trade, Weston Wilson, 783 Downing St., Denver, CO 80218

Kiss Machine #7

As always, Kiss Machine brings some fine writing to the table. There's a love theme running through this issue's veins, and they've included their take on the personal ad with dozens of ads by people all over. The profiles include pet peeves, places they'd travel and the movie star they want to have sex with, as well as descriptions of their bedrooms and what they eat. It makes for some interesting reading about people you don't even know. There are quality essays, short stories, poetry and even some neat sketches. *Kiss Machine* is always worth the price of admission and then some. (CS)

\$4, PO Box 108, Station P, Toronto, ON, M5S 2S8 Canada, www.kissmachine.org

Kitchen Sink #5

This is a beefy magazine with professionally styled writing and lots of great illustrations, tons of content and few ads. Subjects include queer issues, media watchdogs, art and film. Excellent overall. (JB)

\$6, 5245 College Ave., #301, Oakland, CA 94618

Left Back #2

Chadd is back with another great issue. There's a revolutionary, defiant spirit in his words. It's inspiring to know that they made it out for us to see. This time, Chadd talks about why he writes, memories, some excellent poetry plus an interview with REB of *Fanorama* zine. (CS)

\$2, free to inmates, Fanorama Society Publishers, 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905, www.fanorama.tk

Legget Press #6

One page of poetry that is supposedly part of a pamphlet with photography as well. It's tough to judge because they didn't send us the photos, but the poetry is not very strong. (DAL)

50 cents/1 stamp, Legget Press, 1214 College Place, Raleigh, NC 27605

Livingproof #1: Crisis

Andrew makes a small but thick personal zine with a distinctive writing style. It comes across as slam poetry a lot of the time because it's frenzied and intentionally contradictory. I feel like if you met Andrew and said, "Talk about any one thing for a long period of time," he'd do it no problem. He gets mighty longwinded at times here, and it's a comical read, but most of the time it feels like he's writing because he's motivated and not because he has anything to write about. He's a wealthy college student recovering from a recent breakup, and many of these stories revolve around related issues. If you want to connect to someone and read 80 pages of their stories, get this zine. (JB)

\$3, PO Box 14211 Chicago, IL 60614, livingproof@atm4.net

Marimacho #3

Luna writes fiercely about being a lesbian of Mexican and Native American descent, as well as feminism and privilege. She has a great, well-considered writing style, as if she's really taken care to include only the pieces that mean the most. Lost of fun drawings also accompany the words. (CS)

\$1, vivamarimacho@yahoo.com

Media Whore #2

For all the empowering rhetoric scattered within *Media Whore*, there are few pieces documenting the accomplishments of females. Instead we're mostly treated to media bashing, including attacks on the new Liz Phair records and tabloidesque outings of leftist groups. *Media Whore* could benefit from a more balanced perspective. (PS)

\$1, 37 Home St., Malden, MA 02148, www.mediawhore.com

Mesh Hat #7

Like a mix tape in zine form, the author includes European travel diary, late-night thoughts as well as short stories, poetry and articles. This was a good read, but could use a bit of editing. (CS)

\$3 US, \$5 abroad, 6208 Grady's Walk, Bowie, MD 20715, mesh138@hotmail.com

Modern Arizona #4

This is the bathroom-review issue, but Joe Unseen mostly tells unexciting anecdotes about the bar and restaurant scene in New York and Amsterdam. One to two sentences at the end of each story mention the bathroom(s). Note: Interesting placement of the Anne Frank house/toilet description—sandwiched between two Amsterdam hooker stories. (AJA)

\$1 USA/\$2 outside USA/trade, Joe Unseen, PO Box 494, Brewster, NY 10509

Modest Proposal #3

I like the concept of this zine: interviews with well-known comedians (including Amy Sedaris, Jim Breuer and Dave Attel, among others) plus some satirical pieces by the authors. The interviews are a bit stale compared to the comedians' live performances, but they still hold up well conversationally. (CS)

\$3, PO Box 3211, Tempe, AZ 85280, www.modestproposalmag.com

My Vivid Blanket #2

My Vivid Blanket features reviews of ready-to-eat meals from an army surplus store, a travel diary, how to get free entertainment, a Texas story and camping tales. The stories are interesting and give good depth, some funny and pleasant reading. (JB)

\$2, PO Box 7880, Tampa, FL 33673, tumblekids@hotmail.com

Nero Fiddled While Rome Burned #5

This issue includes some very funny Schwarzenegger/Bush bashing, as well as a longer piece made up of textual quotes by such authors as Bertrand Russell, Chomsky and Marx on topics like U.S. foreign policy, Christianity—the religious oppressor and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (AJA)

3 stamps/trade, Jacob David, PO Box 3050, Eureka, CA 95502

Oh Happy Day #2

A zine made up of abstract, poetic ramblings on humans' nature to keep themselves at bay—moving, searching and, mostly, not knowing what for. An introspective piece with thought-provoking, cut-and-paste images, it's somewhat haphazardly put together. (AJA)

No price given, johnnybroken@hotmail.com

Oh Happy Day #3

The poor person's art zine compiled from stolen art and stolen text, haphazardly arranged. OHD feels like an abstract design website that has been printed to black and white. Coming in at just 10 small pages, it brings out your inner ADD. (AA)

No price given, johnnybroken@hotmail.com

Oh, The Drama!

This issue is made up of one pretty typical story about a drunken night out—except it's the writer's mother who ends up inebriated. I'm sure this experience was very entertaining for the author, but it falls flat to the audience. (AJA)

\$1 + stamp, Angela Weyrens, 630 SE Yamhill #205, Portland, OR 97214

Oh The Drama: Land Of The Loon (Or: What I Did on My Summer Vacation)

Be forewarned: the following review is going to be biased because I think Angela McArthur is awesome. There, I said it. I don't know Angela, I have never spoken to her, and she never gave me money. And, yes, I still think she kicks ass because months ago I came across her writing on my own volition and snatched up three issues of her individually titled zines. Imagine my delight when I found LOTL in my review box, featuring stories about her idiosyncratic trip home to Fergus Falls, Minn. In just 10 pages, we learn that her well-meaning grandfather once told Angela that she looked like a hooker and about the time her mother tried to comfort her "anal intentions." You really can't go wrong with any story that refers the A-word. Angela makes you wanna ditch your own dysfunctional family and trade up to hoopy crazy in her world. Take a visit to where the real loons live. (AA)

No price given, Ohthedrama2003@yahoo.com

Other #3

Well-done zine for those "people who defy categories." The theme of this issue is "She's Got Balls," and it's about having the *cahones* to just do it with the utmost confidence. Essays about "the boundary police," fag hags trying to quench their queer addictions. (AA)

No price given, IFUC, PMB #1523, 1850 Union St., San Francisco, CA 94123, www.othermag.org

Panties And A Morbid Angel T-Shirt

A eulogy to the Wrong Brothers, a band that existed from 1987 until a few years ago. It's kind of goofy, though, because it's written by one of its very self-indulgent members. The band was creative and seemed interesting, combining two opposing musical styles and having creative outfits. (JB)

Two stamps, 52 Strickland Lane, Ardmore, TN 38449

Perpetually 12 #4

The best thing about *Perpetually Twelve* is that it knows it's nonsensical, but doesn't care in the slightest. Some parts are very funny (like the celebrity death poll), while others are obviously only funny to those who know the inside joke. But that's all part of the preteen charm here. (CS)

\$2.50, puntmedia@aol.com

Philadelphia Independent #13

This issue of Philly's fearless news source attacks digital voting, electoral politics, lawsuits against an art foundation and examines the changes in bicycle slang. Always a good read. (JB)

\$1, 1026 Arch St. Philadelphia, PA 19107, www.phindie.com

Picaresque #5

Brendan recounts his past as a teenage ne'er-do-well who sent teachers into hysterics with a humorous series of official letters sent to mum and dad. *Picaresque* is a sparse and jumbled glimpse into this bratty Aussie's psyche. (PS)

\$2, C/-3 Sharpley Ave, Stawell, Victoria, Australia, 3380, brendanrocks@hotmail.com

Pick Your Poison #4

You think writing out your dismal résumé is depressing? Try compressing it into a zine of half-baked temp jobs from one faceless corporation to another. Welcome to Adulthood, kids! PYP chronicles Nate's employment history, petrol pimp to data-entry zombie. (AA)

\$2, Nate Gangelhoff, PO Box 8995, Minneapolis, MN 55408

Pipe Bomb #26

Chelsea is a punk-as-fuck high school kid from Athens, Ga., who writes comics about being just that. This issue came with a big honkin' maxipad to celebrate its "monthly" status and includes contributions from friends about their own teenage drama. (AA)

\$1, zinepipebomb@yahoo.com

Propaganda #2

It's a punk-rock zine about music and stuff. Interviews with Face to Face, Poison The Well and more. A tour of London skate parks as well. Reviews of CDs too. Yup, I'm bored. What about you? (AA)

\$3/£2/£1. PO Box 2837, Calverton, Nottingham, NG14 6WU, UK, propagandazine@hotmail.com

Quickdummies #16

Filled with columns, record reviews and band interviews, this zine suffers from some really choppy writing, but Robb's complete sincerity and love for the music and community override all the technical stuff. The European tour diary of Out Cold and the "Flyer Invasion" spread were highlights. (AJA)

\$4 US/\$4 Canada, Robb Roemershauser, 6810 Bellaire Drive, New Orleans, LA 70124, www.geocities.com/qdzine

Rancid News #4

British punk scene zine that follows the format of *MRR* with columns and interviews. This one doesn't seem to take itself as seriously, though, which is nice. Interviews include Hot Water Music and Stretch Arm Strong, among many others. Also quality record and zine reviews. (CS)

No price given, PO Box 382, 456-458 The Strand, London, WC2R 0DZ, UK

Rated Rookie #5

Well-written stories about our everyday bumps in the road. Highlight includes a story by a Vietnamese-American dude from the South who joined the Church of Latter Day Saints to get some poony. Now, that's hella commitment—100 percent read-worthy. (AA)

\$62 Park Place #3, Brooklyn, NY 11238, www.ratedrookie.com

Result, The #5

The first half, in which the author ruminates about graduating college and what that means, is very good. But she lost me in the second part, where she attempts to analyze her problems with girls. Overall, though, the writing is very good and paired with lots of imaginative little drawings. (CS)

50 cents, Olivia Pojar, 1668 A Pender St. East, Vancouver BC V5L 1W3, Canada, Olivia.Pojar@elf.mcgill.ca

Riot 77 #6

A relatively typical music publication focusing on more popular independent punk bands. Interviews, reviews and ads fill the pages. The interviews rarely break ground, but I found myself reading quite a bit anyway. (JB)

\$4, Cian Hynes, 31 St. Patricks Park, Clondalkin, Dublin 22 Ireland, riot77magazine@hotmail.com

Say What #3

A very impressive publication focused on promoting and encouraging local artists and empowering youth. The eye-pleasing layout drew me into the articles, which cover fine-tuning your writing, pursuing art careers and popular music. Great eye-opening and idealistic reading. (JB)

Donation, Young Chicago Authors, 2049 W. Division, Chicago, IL 60622, www.youngchicagoauthors.org

Sherbert #4

A lot of money went into this: heavy stock, spray-painted stencil, excellent print job, temporary tattoos, three-color silkscreened clock (?) and a CD sampler all in a plastic baggie. As much fun as it is to look at, touch and taste (yes, I did), it wasn't enough of a distraction from the bland hipster literary magazine it really is. (VC)

No price given, PO Box 297, Denver, CO 80201-297, www.sherbertmagazine.com

S.I.D.B.S. Pamphlet

A satirical joke/spoof educational pamphlet about David Bowie abducting children (à la *Labyrinth*) and how to prevent that and deal with the situation. Humorous and entertaining. (JB)

Free, Olivia Pojar 1668 A Pender St. East Vancouver, BC V5L 1W3

Signal To Noise #32

Why would we review the established journal for free jazz, avant rock, world, etc.? It just seems wrong. Why? Not because it's unpunk, but because the music covered outdoes punks on several levels of progressive growth. We're not worthy! With William Parker and Neil Michael Hagerty (Royal Trux, Pussy Galore). (VC)

\$3.95, PO Box 585, Winooski, VT 05404, www.signalltonoisemagazine.org

Slug And Lettuce #77

Another issue of the classic anarcho-punk newspaper. As always, it contains great photography, artwork, columns, reviews and a forum for the DIY community. Essential reading. (JB)

60 cents, PO Box 26632 Richmond, VA 23261-6632

Songs About Ghosts #1

Masterfully crafted lit/per zine with countless metaphors that roll off the tongue and leave me with a smile. Stories of the hot summer in NY, exploring abandoned buildings, drinking beer on the fire escape and quiet moments alone with a partner. The stories are all touching and honest in their own way, leaving readers to take from it what they will, and I think it works out nicely this way. I should also mention this thing is fucking huge—100 pages—jam-packed with incredible stories. It's hours' worth of reading material. It also has photography and artwork stuck in every now and then for good measure. Get this if you enjoy engaging reading. (JB)

\$2, Jasmine, PMB #5, 302 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.songsaboutghosts.com

Songs About Ghosts #2

Zines that document epic meaning in daily, mundane activities usually fail. Sure, that tofu scramble was awesome, but it didn't profoundly change your life. Jasmine finds basic meaning from an epic story, ties its relevance to Rilke writings, thusly creating a moving piece of work. (VC)

\$1 or trade for a zine or a letter about your hometown, Jasmine Dreame Wagner, PMB #5, 302 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211

Stereo City #2

A cut-and-pasty zine with ruminations and band interviews. Responses to the war with Iraq, communication and some live reviews round it out. I'm normally not moved by fanzines of this nature, but this one struck a chord with me. It's honest. (JB)

\$3, Ben, 3 Ferry Cottages Co. Sheston, Pembroke, Pembrokeshire, SA72 4TY UK

Substandart #4

This unassuming little zine kind of snuck up on me, and it turns out it's really good. It's the type of zine that you experience more than you read, with a smooth mix of art, typewritten text and handwriting, white space, arrows and little, weird graphics leading you ever onward. There are clever snippets of something or other ("I put a mirror in front of my television. So that it would be forced to watch itself.") that eventually become nicely written, amusing personal stories. There's a great brief one about working at a drive-in sandwich shop, and a longer story about a chair. (DAL)

No price given, www.substandart.com

Sugar Needle #24

Much like its subject matter, *Sugar Needle* is a short blast of flavor that leaves you rattled and wanting more. This issue's theme is bad

candy and highlights some of the worst confections in stores today. An interview with The Epoxies shows SN is capable of a more balanced diet. (PS)

\$2, PO Box 300152, Minneapolis, MN 55408

Take On Your Heroes #2

Straightforward music info zine including interviews with Karl Backman, The Vectors, D.J. Bonebrake, Gary Floyd, Sub Incision and music reviews. Hey, it's free! (AA)

Free, PO Box 98395, Atlanta, GA 30359

Underworld Crawl #1

In *Dishwasher*, readers got wage-slave tales delivered in deadpan sarcasm. It wasn't the events that took place, but how each interaction was characterized with slightly annoyed boredom. Now, let's throw this slacker in a factory and pump him full of spite. Seriously, take it to 11. Our protagonist offers hardened views on his stupid neighbors, piece-of-shit coworkers and glorious Ken Vandermark records. In the realm of personal zines, it's the embittered assholes who make for the best introspective writing. If we're not laughing with their brand of wit, we're laughing at the lack of it. In the new millennium, who needs another personal zine with some emo loser describing the bark off the tree in his backyard and how that makes him feel? Especially not when we have a story of a maliciously antagonistic co-worker who constantly pulls pranks like announce over the PA that your wife is cheating on you, secretly licks the mayonnaise off your sandwich and covers his company locker with photos of car accidents and lynchings. The writing's crafty, the content is organized, and there's enough emotional diversity (what, maturity?!) to warrant a great first issue. (VC)

\$2 or trade, R. Lee, PO Box 1421, Oshkosh, WI 54903, r-lee@new.r.com

Wonkavision #23

Planted firmly on the fence between mainstream punk coverage and posicore idealism, *Wonkavision* stands out amongst the slew of quasi-professional zines littering newsstands by maintaining its fanatic urgency. This issue features an extensive, if at times exhausting, look at the power struggle inside today's hardcore scene. Utilizing its pages as an open forum gaining perspective from past and present players within the scene (including members of the Dead Kennedys, Bane, Thursday, Sick Of It All and Ian Mackaye, to name a few), *Wonkavision* gives a thorough perspective on punk as a commodity. Articles like these may seem a bit trite to those of us who caught the brunt of it in the mid-'90s punk explosion, but these days the topic is rarely addressed in the media. Proving to be more than a cabal of furrowed browed scene police, *Wonkavision* includes plenty of tongue-in-cheek barbs at some of the scene's more laughable aspects, including a punk-themed *New York Times*-style Quizze. Also featured: interviews with The Mars Volta, Paint It Black and Strike Anywhere. (PS)

\$3, PO Box 63642, Philadelphia, PA 19147, www.wonkavisionmagazine.com

You Were Here #1

Rachel weaves all of her experiences together with newspaper-clipping collages and typewriter text. It's a bit hard to tell where one story ends and another begins, but she writes about going to work for K Records, living with friends, traveling to Seattle and Portland and lots of other things. (CS)

No price given, Rachel, 1011 12th St., Anacortes, WA 98221, hungryghost@hotmail.com

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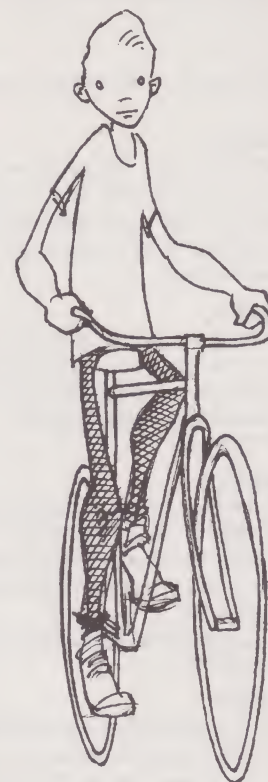
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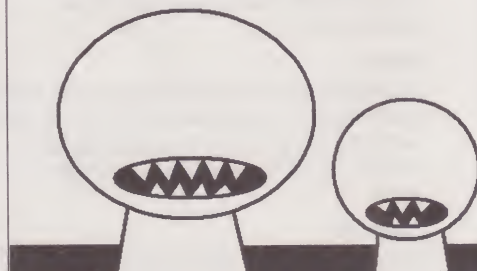


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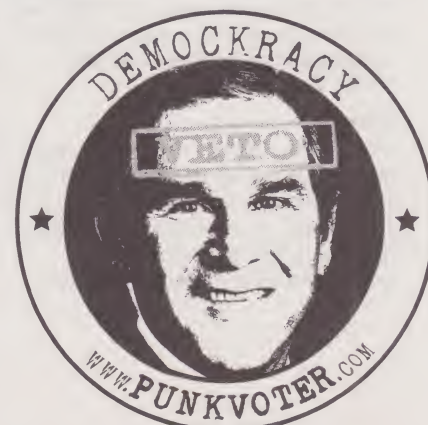
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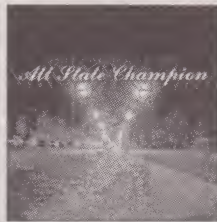
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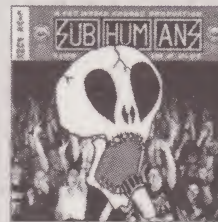
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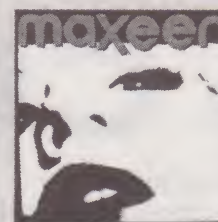
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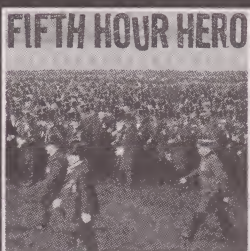
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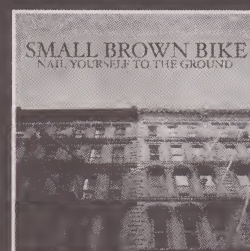
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comics

edited by Anne Elizabeth Moore

Anthropocentric Anthology Anthropology

Top Shelf Asks The Big Questions, Legal Action Comics, Vol. 2, Meat Haus #7: Love Songs
Various Artists

A few years ago, under the name Ruthie Penmark, I wrote a terribly long review of several anthologies for *The Comics Journal*, my former place of employ. The review used the exciting technique of math to discuss gender discrimination in the arts, and it used the equally thrilling technique of constant references to personal sexual experiences to retain the attention of comic-book-geek readers throughout the, as I mentioned, terribly long article. This latter technique seems to have failed — the review was printed without the final sentence-and-a-half, and not a soul noticed — although the math thing turned out to be pretty interesting.

In short, I found the following of anthologies in the year 2000:

Anthologies reviewed: 9
Total number of pages reviewed: 1,366
Average pages per anthology: 151.56
Total number of comics: 248
Average number of pages per comic: 6.36
Total number of artists represented: 256 (artists appearing multiple times, including Chris Ware and Johnny Ryan, were counted only once)
Total number of male artists represented: 231
Total number of female artists represented: 25
Total number of male characters represented: 649
Total number of female characters represented: 374

Three years later, and I'm unsure anything has changed for the better. I have my own views on gender inequity in the comics industry, based partially on personal experience and partially on the experiences of others. But there is one way to find out. So, I investigated a small collection of anthologies from the year 2003 to discover the following:

Anthologies reviewed: 3
Total number of pages reviewed: 812
Average pages per anthology: 270.67
Total number of comics: 171
Average number of pages per comic: 4.75
Total number of artists represented: 157 (artists appearing multiple times, including Tomer Hanuka and Johnny Ryan, were counted only once)
Total number of male artists represented: 144
Total number of female artists represented: 13
Total number of male characters represented: 566
Total number of female characters represented: 228 (six are naked and fucking each other; approximately ten are performing blowjobs on men, and only one woman is naked and engaged in sex with a man. Approximately one third of the women depicted are naked from at least the waist up or wearing only brassieres.)

Perhaps it isn't the fairest of years to collect empirical evidence. The economy's been stinky, the world's gone crazy, and the arts haven't exactly been the best way of making a living ever since September 11, 2001, when a war was declared on illustration, as well as everything else. But a scaling-back of graphic-novel publishing (which no one in comics can deny has happened of late) should be just as gender equitable as those idyllic days of 2000. And at a 10.24% female artist rate in 2000, compared to a 12.08% rate right now, well, we can hardly believe marked success has been made.

A few words about content. I anticipated *Top Shelf's* latest anthology eagerly; previous collections have been inspired and energetic and filled with new talent. This one is not lacking for new talent, but the youthful energy is not leading the collection; stalwart contributors are also tapped such as Jason, Alan Moore, and Chris Ware. Particularly standout are works by Zak Sally, whose scratchboard 5-pager relays the ridiculous inner monologue of a paranoid man changing a lightbulb, and Monkms, who contributes a mute story about a vicious dog and a frightened man. "Milkie's Take to the Sky," is a sweet story about kids by Max Estes, and Renee French turns in a great single page called "Let's Learn Maori," combining her fantastic sense of the macabre with pure absurdity and detailed pencilwork. Other selections, however, hang together less well and read as ads for upcoming work — or in some cases, actually are ads for upcoming work.

Legal Action Comics, vol. 2, I anticipated much less eagerly. The first Hellman collection was put out in response to a legitimately divisive issue, the Hellman-Rall lawsuit, which has since become tired. The participants, too, seem tired. No one cares much anymore. Not that the whole thing wasn't great fun at the time — Rall's self-important mocking of Art Spiegelman deserved a pranking like the one he got from Hellman, and Hellman's impersonation of Rall to a wide array of Internet e-mail list subscribers probably deserved a legislative reprimand in return. But that was five years ago. Since, the whole thing has become, in Hellman's own words, "a monument to pettiness and stupidity." It seems difficult to create an interesting project with this monument as your inspiration. Of course, it's also difficult to create a totally worthless project when most of your contributors are comic geniuses, but there is a trade-off. What was funniest about Rall and Hellman, however, was the constant spew of bile that could emanate from each, set off by only the merest hint of the others' presence. When Hellman turns that bile on other comics figures, and Sam Henderson draws a silly naked picture to go with it — or Johnny Ryan, or Andrice Arp, or Michael Kupperman, or Carol Lay — well, that's just pretty good readin'.

Meat Haus, a nice, square, orange little book, suffers greatly from a lack of copy-editing. The work ranges from great (Kenichi Hoshine, Tomer Hanuka, Zachary Flagg, P. Williams) to, umm, not so great (here I won't name names), but the spelling is inconsistent throughout. If the design of the book weren't so good, this problem would stand out less, but as it is, it's apparent that cartoonists can't spell for shit. Some can, however, draw. Several penciled pieces stand out in particular, enough to hope that *Meat Haus* could find it's niche in really finely rendered artwork. —Anne Elizabeth Moore

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Demo #1 and #2

Brian Wood and Becky Cloonan

After working on an X-book for Marvel, writer Brian Wood learned "that it's really hard to get the stench of superheroes out of your clothes," and teamed up with artist Becky Cloonan for a twelve-part series that's in part a response to the superhero genre, but also a respectful contribution to it. Each issue presents a vignette about characters isolated by their superhuman differences. As in *X-Men*, teens find themselves with abilities they can't control, and that frighten or disgust friends and family. An ongoing project of the X-books (with varying success) has been to create empathetic models for the trials of adolescence — extreme symbols of alienation offered to a demographic whose individual differences (race, class, sexuality, physique, beliefs, interests, etc.) have suddenly been thrown into the fore. Though cut from the same cloth, *Demo's* stories end before a kindly professor in a wheelchair can come to the rescue, and (appropriately) suggest that such an escape is unlikely, rather than patronizing with the promise of heroic payoff. Slight stylistic deviation is evident also, as Wood's scenarios draw a passion for film, while Cloonan's large, spare panels add the crucial pairing of slow pace and foreboding tension, combining for something that feels substantial despite its modest size and scope. — Chris Burkhalter

\$2.95 ea AT/Planet Lar

The Magic Whistle Vol. 2, #8

Sam Henderson

The Magic Whistle. Wow. The style of humor is as if the boys in my sixth grade class wrote a comic. Except with bigger words. And better inking. Funny, in a perverted way. I personally like "Guys Night Out." That kind of stuff is the shiznit. "Chugbot" [a story about a fraternity party] is OK, although rather sexist. "An Open Letter to My Teenage Son" is, let's face it, boring. [Text is taken from the LP "An Open Letter"

by Victor Lundberg (R. Thompson), copyright 1967 ASCAP] Most people will not understand it unless they have had kids, which I have not. I am sure my grand or even great-grand parents would understand, but I have never flipped off any farmers, as . . . wait, have I never flipped anyone off? I am a deprived child. —Mina Lavender

\$2.95 Alternative Comics, 503 NW 37th Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32609-2204 www.indy-world.com/whistle

Mint on Your Pillow #1 and #2

Rebecca Strom

A quarter-sized mini published by the jokily titled Filegirl Productions *looks* like the bored musings of the god-awfully employed authoress who works, readers discover on the first page, in a doctors office. She files. She looks like the main female character in the comic strip *Baby Blues*, although she appears less anxious. Her life, if accurately rendered, is not necessarily worth reading about. In the second installment, however, Ms. Baby Blues gets a haircut and, apparently travels some. She keeps a sketchbook, meets Jeff Brown (*Clumsy*), and takes classes in art history. All of this seems hopeful, but the sure kick that Rebecca Strom will develop an interesting style are the ever-increasing numbers of pages toward that back with neckless monster characters doing funny things. In these goofy little drawings there is some joy, and Strom — and other starting artists — should celebrate that.

— Anne Elizabeth Moore

Artgrl28@hotmail.com

No More Shaves

David Greenberger and various artists

"In 1979 I took a job as activities director at a nursing home in Boston," David Greenberger explains on his website (www.duplexplanet.com). "I wanted others to know these people as I did." Greenberger began recording conversations with the residents, and built his zine *Duplex Planet* (still running) from their words. Not interested in taking down

biographies, Greenberger looks at who these people are now, "without celebrating or mourning who they were before." The conversations play out as monologues, often in answer to enigmatic questions like "What can robots do?," or "What did George Washington's voice sound like?" His overlying aim is to cast the residents not as 'the elderly,' but as unique individuals, while at the same time exploring the realities of aging. At some point, various comic artists began adding their various visual inventions to the words. It's from this material that this collection draws, with art contributions from, among others, Rick Altergott, Dan Clowes, Jason Lutes, Pat Moriarty, Paul Nitsche, Dean Rohrer, Wayno, and Holly Jane Zachary.

Greenberger is by-and-large absent from the book as a character. Twice he appears in physical form, and twice his voice intrudes. Several times (my favorite moments) comments are directed specifically at Greenberger: "I swore at him, but you don't need to put that word in there," "1942 - no, put 1943," "If this doesn't sound good to you, just tear it up." Greenberger's name usually - but not always - appears above the speaker's in the credits ("As told to David Greenberger by..."), which is telling. Deliberately or not, Greenberger assumes a position of author — or at least creator — through appropriation, while the speakers oddly take on the role of characters rather than authors. By collecting the material and selecting choice passages from it, Greenberger stands as the 'voice-giver' of an underrepresented people, for the consumption of readers who I imagine have more in common with (and perhaps more interest in) Greenberger and the artists than with the speakers themselves. Certainly the issue of outsider exploitation cannot be avoided. "What are snakes?" "What is gravity?" What kind of questions are these? Simple questions well-suited for capturing the flow of the speaker's stream-of-consciousness, but additionally opportunities to prey on the comedic possibilities of the factual inaccuracy and absurdist character of their answers. Yet clearly the residents are aware of Greenberger's zine (as evi-

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denced by the quotes above), which adds yet another element, performance. One wonders at times to what degree the speakers are playing mere caricatures of themselves. Doing so, it seems they'd improve the odds of minor comic fame.

Suffice it to say, it's a complicated animal, this *No More Shaves*, but not one without pathos and a few genuinely poignant moments. Regardless of intentions, it presents itself as both multifaceted conceptual project and nervy, provocative raw matter. The material begs — even welcomes — a critical eye and demands an unmitigated response, and is as vulnerable to its reader's reactions as the nursing home residents are to Greenberger's collection and the artists' renderings. — Chris Burkhalter

\$18.95 Fantagraphics Books, www.fantagraphics.com

Paping #9

John Mejias

Expecting a finely crafted but ultimately meaningless and lame piece of arts/craftsy "commix," I read this string-bound, frayed-edged, orange construction paper mini as if looking for trouble. Block-printed in white and blue, it would be easy for the visuals to dazzle, concealing an unengaging story, or worse, a downright insulting one. However, the story's not at all bad, although a little too Seinfeld for my taste, and the panels are dazzling. A clever mini, well worth seeking out. —Anne Elizabeth Moore

\$5 PO Box 128 45 E. 7th St, NY, NY 10003 speedymysika@aol.com

Rubber Necker #1, #2, and #3

Nick Bertozzi

An ongoing anthology of the work of Nick Bertozzi, Harvey Award-winner *Rubber Necker* is most notable so far for the continuing saga of "Drop Ceiling," although the series does contain awesome, subtly-colored (but still jarring) cover art. The first installment finds our hero Dennis left to handle the lay-off of a loyal friend. Afterwards Dennis forgets to collect his son from daycare. Later, the evening subjects him to various abuses from his girlfriend's family. What distinguishes all this familiar banality as worthwhile is Bertozzi's unflinchingly consistent tone and style. In the third issue Dennis unwittingly stumbles into a life drawing class, where he's confronted with the blank, indifferent stare of the frankly nude model. This scene pretty much sums up Bertozzi's approach in "Drop Ceiling," which largely denies access to Dennis's inner workings, and never appeals to us for compassion, sympathy, or even concern. Fact is, I can't even say I especially like Dennis, but Bertozzi's accomplished numbness draws me on. The short pieces that round out each issue are a mixed bag — sometimes

interesting, sometimes almost unbearably clever. "Drop Ceiling," on the other hand, impresses me, and I intend to follow *Rubber Necker* at least to the end of that story. — Chris Burkhalter

\$3.50 ea., Alternative Comics, 503 NW 37th Avenue, Gainesville, FL 32609-2204 www.indyworld.com

A Sort of Homecoming (preview)

I set a high bar for realistic comics. If the author chooses to use the sequential art medium and not exploit its opportunity to recreate the fantastic, then the unicorn polo in space better be sacrificed for a damn good story. This preview highlights normal humans on Earth using everyday dialog to address an incredibly moving piece of work. A recent death of a childhood friend evokes a series of flashbacks so realistic the characters mold into folks you knew from way back when. The death somehow escapes the pages and lingers in our own air, creating not a sense of haunting, but a deeper sense of sorrow. Near the end, our protagonist's touching epiphany is so crushing it's hard not to choke back tears. The sterility of the story is refreshing, as many comics these days try to distort their reality with over-the-top wackiness, oppressive settings or a subtle hint of the sinister in a serene setting. These are normal people with typical lives who undergo a common experience, but still an experience many of us will never come to terms with. Backed with seamless time travel and great inking, I look forward to the completed graphic novel. —Vincent Chung

\$2, 503 NW 37th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32609-2204, www.indyworld.com/altcomics

This is How We Party

Frankie Chan

At the risk of getting my ass kicked by local music hot-shit Frankie Chan, I review his admitted "first attempt at a comic book" harshly, although I do so for his, and his readers', own good. Chan's comics — derivative but stylish, clunky still but laden with bits of potential — aren't really there yet. His poster work, although a show-offy, vanity inclusion, reveal a comfort with single-image composition he hasn't yet achieved in his individual panels. The best part of his first comic, actually, is the overall design of the book, which is clean and solid (with a sparkly red cover): his linework would benefit from so much consideration. Overall a talent to watch in the future, you can skip the first book from Chan and wait until he really develops his technical skills. It won't be long until they become formidable.

His narrative inspiration, however, requires further development. Immediately, Chan's stories reveal an unfortunate obsession with that Seattle hipster thing. Full of back-handed compliments to the ability of even loser artists to score with hot chicks (don't even tell

me it's self-effacement) and troubled passages about rock-show poster deadlines and the exact amount of casual stand-offishness you should show a girl you really really like. This stuff may sell, but is it *interesting* anymore, years after the tell-all hipster comics genre has already staled? Surely his last experience with a glass of milk was more meaningful. I would urge Chan — and will, when I run into him this weekend — to find more engaging material. That doesn't smack of self-aggrandizing.

Chan may do posters for The Rapture, Pretty Girls Make Graves, Cheap Trick, and the Kills, but you know what? My mom knew Winona Ryder's mom. And I rarely mention that in my work. Ok, except for this one time. —Anne Elizabeth Moore

Cult of Indiana, 107 Eastlake Avenue East #207 Seattle, Washington 98109
Franki_chan@hotmail.com

World War 3 Illustrated #34: Taking Liberties Various Artists

All fitting under the Taking Liberties umbrella, this ambitious anthology's topics include Iraq, US military outposts in South Korea, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Bush's economic policy, unchecked detention of immigrants, and the USA PATRIOT Acts. Stating cases in satirical comic strips, collage, journalistic prose, personal accounts, and semi-abstract art, *World War 3 Illustrated* really drives home the full democratic possibilities of the B&W comic/magazine format (at one time issues cost as little as \$900 to produce). There's a tendency to look to this type of material for a quick fix of leftist politics, telling us things we already know and criticizing policies we already distrust. There's something entirely too benign — even pacifying — about ridiculous Bush caricatures, which can occasionally be found here as well. The work here is strongest when digging up facts before drawing conclusions, and weakest when making brazen accusations without offering supportive evidence. Fortunately, the sheer diversity of the magazine's twenty-odd contributions lets you have it both ways. Settled beside a hilarious cartoon about Cheney's use of Sept. 11 to deflect criticism is a substantial study of New York City's mushrooming installation of surveillance cameras. Carefully balancing satire and concrete information, *World War 3 Illustrated* continues a long tradition of punk politics — staying accessible, and proving vital.

— Chris Burkhalter

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books

EDITED BY JOEL SCHALIT

Ghouls, Gimmicks and Gold: Horror Films and the American Movie Business, 1953-1968

By Kevin Heffernan
Duke University Press

In his new book *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold*, Kevin Heffernan gives us a guided tour through the American horror movie business during the 1950s and 1960s. Heffernan's "ghouls, gimmicks, and gold" of the title refer to, respectively, the production, distribution, and exhibition of these movies—and the Caligaris behind the curtain.

Heffernan begins the tour in 1953 with an investigation into the development and exploitation of the 3-D process, and the two most notable films of that technological race: *House of Wax* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. But after the novelty wore off, these technological innovations made like boom-era Internet stocks and lost their charm.

Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold outlines the post-war movie industry's march toward further internationalization during the early 1960s—leading to the interbreeding of high-art aesthetics and lowbrow exploitation in the poetic films of Italian director Mario Bava—and the TV horror craze of the mid-1960s.

Heffernan wraps things up in 1968, with the releases of *Rosemary's Baby*, which set a trend toward "adult horror," and *Night of the Living Dead*, which started a divergent trend towards the low budget, socially conscious indie horror of the 1970s.

Heffernan's in-depth tracking of the development of these cultural and economic changes, and their effects on the industry gives the average horror movie nerd a better idea of why he had roast beef for dinner, the next day fish, and the day after that a nice ham. He also does a tasteful job of sprinkling the thematic and aesthetic consistencies and developments of the genre over his historical analysis, while critically showcasing classic creepers. If there's anything Heffernan missed, I'm not aware of it.

While it's hard to argue with the depth of his research, at times *Ghouls, Gimmicks, and Gold* longs for more personal insight from the author. In the midst of a hilarious description of an off-the-wall movie promotion tactic, or an in-depth thematic analysis of an interesting film, I would sometimes wonder what Heffernan personally thought about the films.

American film history, horror or otherwise, needs to be brought to life and not just chronologically recorded in a book for posterity. We need to send people back in time, shepherd them back into those movie seats, and hand them their popcorn and

soda. Kevin Heffernan gives you all the information, but sometimes forgets to tell you why you should care if you're not already hooked. There's so much to learn by watching old movies. They are living samples from an extinct past. Elvis Presley still sells millions of records, and Hemingway still gets around, but most people have never seen *Rebel Without a Cause*, or know why it might be something worth seeing. —Mike Hobart

Headless

By Benjamin Weissman
Akashic Books

All short story collections are bathroom reading, but some more than others. Some collections of ponderous near-novellas would require either awesome concentration or awful constipation to follow their narratives. But few books—once you eliminate the ones with "Uncle John" and "Darwin" in the titles—are as suited to water closet consumption as *Headless*.

It's not just the fact that most of the 22 stories in this collection are short and snappy. It's also the fact that they are twisted as fuck, and frequently indulge in bizarre bathroom humor. For example, "Hitler Ski Story" ends with the Fuhrer taking a dump in the snow; "Death by Toilet" has a boy recording himself making a U-shaped turd for a bathrobe-wearing pervert; and "The Fecality of It All," well, let's just say it lives up to its title.

In between the poop jokes, there are some screamingly hilarious monologues, like "Pink Slip of Wood," in which the speaker fires a subordinate whose oversized prick drives his coworkers insane with insecurity. In Benjamin Weissman's world, parents and children scheme each others' deaths, gentle lumberjacks and highway patrolmen escort family men into permanent gay servitude, and insanity lurks just beneath the surface of the most mundane domesticity.

An unflinching examination of the meaning of masculinity, the book is divided into four sections. One section addresses violence and squalor. The second, romantic relationships in which men are often either perplexed or infantilized by their "mommy" partners. The third section takes on sexuality (and sexual insecurity). The final section looks at fathers and the damage they do, by their presence as well as their absence.

Headless has moments of unbearable poignancy hidden amongst the weirdness and jarring experimental wordplay. Most notably in "Marnie," the story of a man whose friend goes into a coma after a skiing accident, life's random

absurdity dishes up grief, and suddenly you may need your toilet paper to dab at unmanly tears. —Charlie Anders

A Civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture

Edited by Eyal Segal and Rafi Weizman
Verso/Babel

According to *A Civilian Occupation*'s Zvi Efrat, Israel represents one of the most "controlled and efficient architectural experiments of the modern era," on a par with Stalin's Five Year Plan for the USSR and the infrastructural and public work projects undertaken during FDR's New Deal. Say what? As any visitor to the country will tell you, Israeli architecture is anything but striking. 1930s Bauhaus structures sit alongside red tiled stucco homes and apartment buildings not too dissimilar from new housing developments in Italy, France, or the Costa del Sol. If it weren't for constant suicide bombings and the presence of armed soldiers everywhere, visitors to the country might think that they were somewhere in southern Europe, not the Middle East.

As the contributors to Eyal Segal and Rafi Weizman's collection would have you understand it, it's not the Mediterranean anonymity of Israeli architecture that's important, but the special narrative of colonization and occupation that it represents. Though pitched as a book intended to explain the political function of Israeli architecture, Segal and Weizman's collection is as much an unveiling of the tradition of civil and urban planning that has always been a part of the Zionist program, equally critical of its effects on both Arabs and Israelis.

With the aide of maps, landscape and areal photographs, documentary film stills, urban planning documents, and an interview with an architect responsible for designing the iconographic settlements of Maaleh Adumim and Emmanuel, the overall effects of *A Civilian Occupation* are comparable to a nightmarishly assembled a/v installation, in addition to being a terrific collection of incredibly passionate political essays. Sometimes the translation from the original Hebrew is a bit wooden and the postmodernist jargon a bit obtuse, but with such a good/bad trip of a book like this, it's easily overlooked.

In a world of historical and journalistic literature on the subject, *A Civilian Occupation* is a welcome break from a traditional mode of writing about the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a literary endeavor, it begs emulation in any number of current and future conflict. The possibilities are endless. —Joel Schalit

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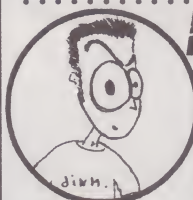
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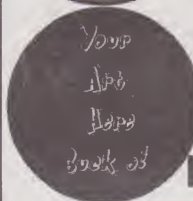
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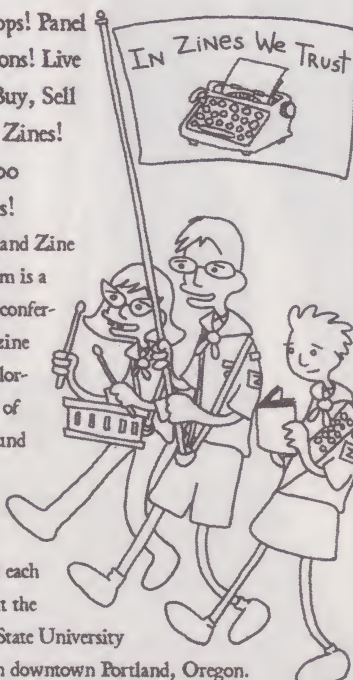
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see also

Where to find more information
about this issue's features.

interviewed this issue:

Ian McKaye

Dischord Records—the label that Ian co-owns with Minor Threat's Jeff Nelson—is your best bet for keeping abreast of all of the new news about Ian, the Evens, Northern Liberties, and of course, Fugazi: www.dischord.com

Sleater Kinney

The amazing women of Sleater-Kinney's are online at: www.sleater-kinney.com

All of their records are available from Kill Rock Stars: www.killrockstars.com

Mike Watt

For the latest news and views from the always entertaining and enlightening Watt, check out his "hoot page" (whatever that is): www.hootpage.com

Erase Errata

For everything you ever wanted to know about Erase Errata, but were afraid to ask, go to: www.eraseerrata.com

Jello Biafra

Jello's still keeping a very heavy schedule for his spoken word tours. Find out where and when, as well as peruse his solo catalog at Alternative Tentacle's website: www.alternativetentacles.com

Jello will also be out on the PunkVoter tour. Find out more about the organization at www.punkvoter.org

Stella Marris

Stella Marris' cards and other products are available on her website: www.stellamarris.com

She would like to come and talk on college campuses in 2004 and 2005. Please contact Marris through her website.

NoMeansNo

NoMeansNo's 25-year retrospective CD, *The People's Choice*, is available from Wrong Records: www.wrongrecords.ca

According to the Wrong website, NoMeansNo doesn't have a website because "they're assholes."

Neurosis

Neurosis keeps an amazingly complete website at: www.neurosis.com

Their new album, *Neurosis & Jarboe* is available from their own Neurot Recordings: www.neurotrecordings.com

The Descendents

The Descendents may have gotten older, but it doesn't mean they've grown up entirely. Check them out online at: www.descendentsonline.com

Their new album, *Cool To Be You*, is available from Fat Wreck Chords: www.fatwreck.com

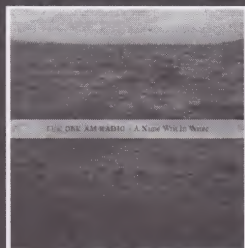
Q and Not U

For more information on the fantastic Q and Not U, go to: www.qandnotu.org

Their two full length albums are available from Dischord Records: www.dischord.co

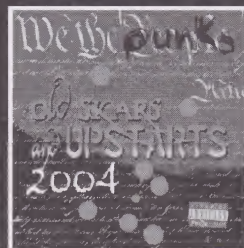


BROKEN BOTTLES
"In The Bottles"

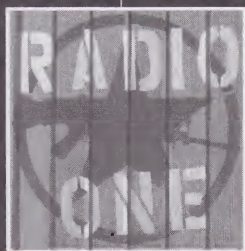


ONE AM RADIO
"A Name Writ In Water"

level-plane



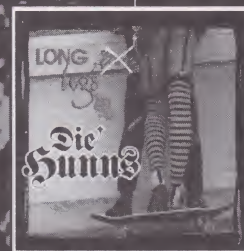
VARIOUS ARTISTS
"Old Skars & Upstarts 2004"



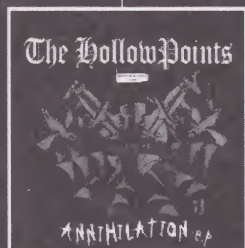
RADIO ONE
"Radio One"



THE CRUMBS
"Last Exit"



DUANE PETERS & THE HUNNS
"Long Legs Die Hunns"



THE HOLLOW POINTS
"Annihilation"

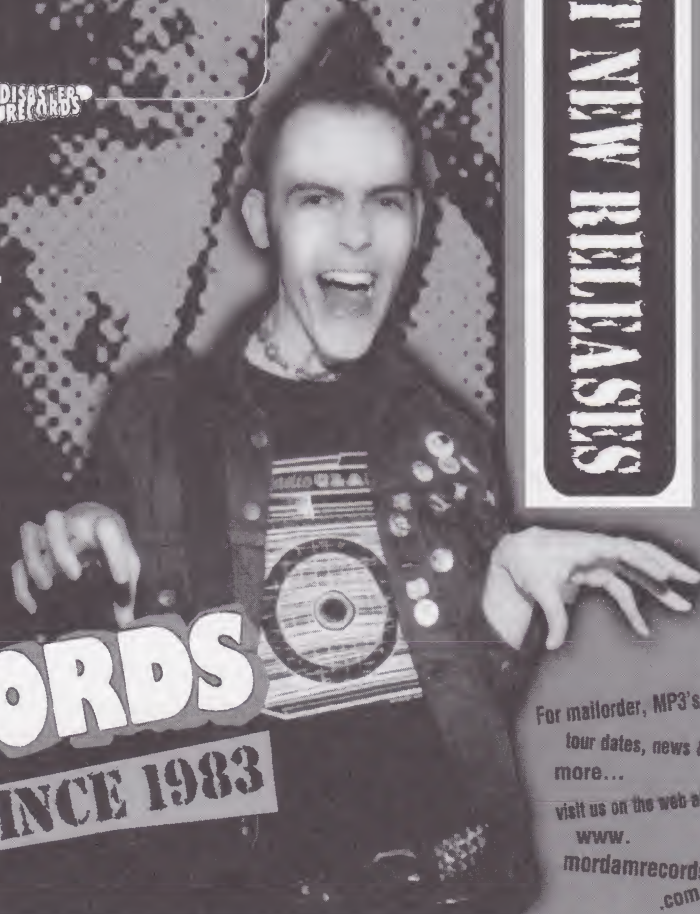


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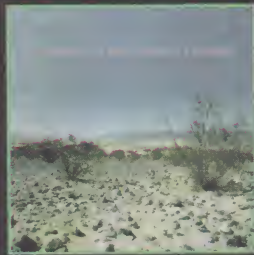
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